THE ARGOSY

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THE ARGOSY

(Published by Cassell's)

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Nod

By WALTER de la MARE

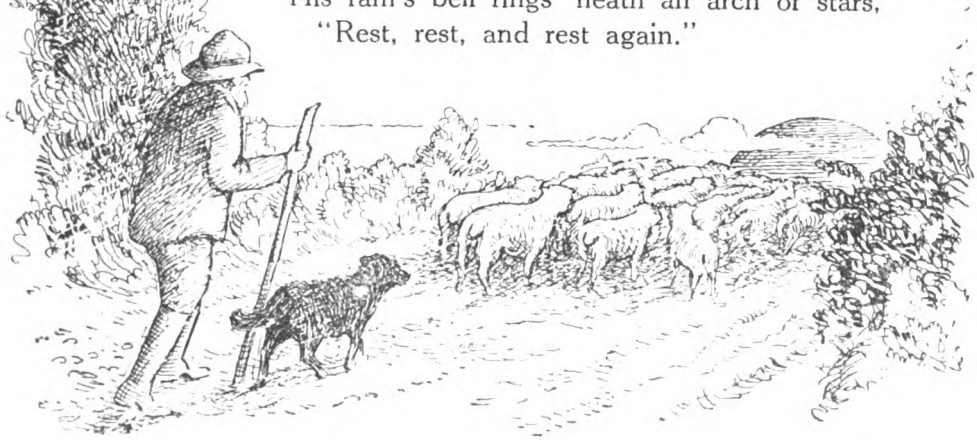
SOFTLY along the road of evening,
In a twilight dim with rose,
Wrinkled with age and drenched with dew
Old Nod, the shepherd, goes.

His drowsy flock streams on before him
Their fleeces charged with gold,
To where the sun's last beam leans low
On Nod the shepherd's fold.

The hedge is quick and green with briar,
From their sand the conies creep;
And all the birds that fly in heaven
Flock singing home to sleep.

His lambs outnumber a noon's roses,
Yet, when night's shadows fall,
His blind old sheep-dog, Slumber-soon
Misses not one of all.

His are the quiet steeps of dreamland
The waters of no-more-pain,
His ram's bell rings 'neath an arch of stars,
"Rest, rest, and rest again."



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The ARGOSY
The WORLD'S BEST STORIES

Vol. 1.—No. 9. FEBRUARY, 1927

The Water Hole

Is every man naturally a coward?

By MAXWELL STRUTHERS BURT

SOME men are like the twang of a bow-string. Hardy was like that—short, lithe, sunburned, vivid. Into the lives of Jarrick, Hill, and myself, old classmates of his, he came and went in the fashion of one of those queer winds that on a sultry day in summer blow unexpectedly up a city street out of nowhere. His comings excited us; his goings left us refreshed and a little vaguely discontented. So many people are grey. Hardy gave one a shock of colour, as do the deserts and the mountains he inhabited. It was not particularly what he said—he didn't talk much—it was his appearance, his direct, a trifle fierce, gestures, the sense of mysterious lands that pervaded him. One never knew when he was coming to New York and one never knew how long he was going to stay; he just appeared, was very busy with mining companies for a while, sat about clubs in the late afternoon and then, one day, he was gone.

Sometimes he came twice in a year; oftener, not for two or three years at a stretch. When he did come we gave him a dinner—that is, Jarrick, Hill, and myself. And it was rather an occasion. We would procure a table in the gayest restaurant we could find, near, but not too near, the music—Hill it was who first suggested this as a dramatic bit of incongruity between Hardy and the frequenters of Broadway—and the most exotic food obtainable, for a good part of his time Hardy, we knew, lived upon camp fare. Then we would try to make him tell about his experiences. Usually he wouldn't. Impersonally, he was entertaining about South Africa, about the Caucasus, about Alaska, Mexico, anywhere you care to think; but concretely he might have been an illustrated lecture for all he mentioned himself. He was passionately fond of abstract argument. "Y'see," he would explain, "I don't get half as much of this sort of thing as I want. Of course, one does run across remarkable people—now, I met a cow-puncher once who knew Keats by heart—but as a rule I deal only with material things, mines and prospects and assays and that sort of thing." Poor chap! I wonder if he thought that we, with our brokering and our writing and our lawyering, dealt much with ideas! I remember one night when we sat up until three discussing the philosophy of prohibition over three bottles of port. I wonder how many other men have done the same thing!

But five years ago—no, it was six—Hardy really told us a real story about himself. Necessarily the occasion is memorable in our recollections. We had dined at Lamb's, and the place was practically empty, for it was long after the theatre hour—only a drowsy waiter here and there, and away over in one corner a young couple who, I suppose, imagined themselves in love. Fancy being in love at Lamb's! We had been discussing, of all things in the world, bravery and conscience and cowardice and original sin, and that sort of business, and

there was no question about it that Hardy was enjoying himself hugely. He was leaning upon the table, a coffee-cup between his relaxed brown hands, listening with an eagerness highly complimentary to the banal remarks we had to make upon the subject. "This is talk!" he ejaculated once with a laugh.

Hill, against the combined attack of Jarrick and myself, was maintaining the argument. "There is no such thing as instinctive bravery," he affirmed, for the fifth time at least, "amongst intelligent men. Every one of us is naturally a coward. Of course we are. The more imagination we've got the more we can realize how pleasant life is, after all, and how rotten the adjuncts of sudden death. It's reason that does the trick—reason and tradition. Do you know of any one who is brave when he is alone—except, that is, when it is a case of self-preservation? No! Of course not. Did you ever hear of any one choosing to go along a dangerous road or to ford a dangerous river unless he had to—that is, any one of our class, any man of education or imagination? It's the greater fear of being thought afraid that makes us brave. Take a lawyer in a shipwreck—take myself! Don't you suppose he's frightened? Naturally he is, horribly frightened. It's his reason, his mind, that after a while gets the better of his poor pipe-stem legs and makes them keep pace with the sea-legs about them."

"It's condition," said Jarrick doggedly—"condition entirely. All has to do with your liver and digestion. I know; I fox-hunt, and when I was younger—yes, leave my waist alone!—I rode jumping races. When you're fit there isn't a horse alive that bothers you, or a fence, for that matter."

"Ever try standing on a ship's deck, in the dark, knowing you're going to drown in about twenty minutes?" asked Hill.

Hardy leaned forward to strike a match. "I don't agree with you," he said.

"Well, but—" began Hill.

"Neither of you."

"Oh, of course, you're outside the argument. You lead an adventurous life. You keep in condition for danger. It isn't fair."

"No." Hardy lit his cigarette and inhaled a puff thoughtfully. "You don't understand. All you have to say does have some bearing upon things, but, when you get down to brass tacks, it's instinct—at the last gasp, it's instinct. You can't get away from it. Look at the difference between a thoroughbred and a cold-blooded horse! There you are! That's true. It's the fashion now to discount instinct, I know; well—but you can't get away from it. I've thought about the thing—a lot. Men are brave against their better reason, against their conscience. It's a mixed-up thing. It's confusing and—and sort of damnable," he concluded lamely.

"Sort of damnable!" ejaculated Hill wonderingly.

"Yes, damnable."

I experienced inspiration. "You've got a concrete instance back of that," I ventured.

Hardy removed his gaze from the ceiling. "Er—" he stammered. "Why, yes—yes. That's true."

"You'd better tell it," suggested Hill; "otherwise your argument is not very conclusive."

¶

HARDY fumbled with the spoon of his empty coffee-cup. It was a curious gesture on the part of a man whose franknesses were as clean-cut as his silences. "Well—" he began. "I don't know. Perhaps. I did know a man, though, who saved another man's life when he didn't want to, when there was every excuse for him not to, when he had it all reasoned out that it was wrong, the very wrongest possible thing to do; and he saved him because he couldn't help it, saved him at the risk of his own life, too."

"He did!" murmured Hill incredulously.

"Go on!" I urged. I was aware that we were on the edge of a revelation.

Hardy looked down at the spoon in his hand, then up and into my eyes.

"It's such a queer place to tell it"—he smiled deprecatingly—"here, in this restaurant. It ought to be about a camp-fire, or something like that. Here it seems out of place, like the smell of bacon or sweating mules. Do you know Los Pinos? Well, you wouldn't. It was just a few shacks and a Mexican gambling-house when I saw it. Maybe it isn't there any more, at all. You know—those places! People build them and then go away, and in a year there isn't a thing, just desert again and shifting sand and maybe the little original old ranch by the one spring." He swept the table-cloth with his hand, as if sweeping something into oblivion, and his eyes sought again the spoon. "It's queer, that business. Men and women

go out to lonely places and build houses, and for a while everything goes on in miniature, just as it does here—daily bread and hating and laughing—and then something happens, the gold gives out or the fields won't pay, and in no time nature is back again. It's a big fight. You lose track of it in crowded places." He raised his head and settled his arms comfortably on the table.

" I wasn't there for any particular purpose. I was on a holiday. I'd been on a big job up in Colorado and was rather done up and, as there were some prospects in New Mexico I wanted to see, I hit south, drifting through Santa Fé and Silver City, until I found myself way down on the southern edge of Arizona. It was still hot down there—hot as blazes—it was about the first of September—and the rattlesnakes and the scorpions were still as active as crickets. I knew a chap that had a cattle outfit near the Mexican border, so I dropped in on him one day and stayed two weeks. You see, he was lonely. Had a passion for theatres and hadn't seen a play for five years. My second-hand gossip was rather a god-send. But finally I got tired of talking about Mary Mannering, and decided to start north again. He bade me good-bye on a little hill near his place. ' See here ! ' he said suddenly, looking toward the west. ' If you go a trifle out of your way you'll strike Los Pinos, and I wish you would. It's a little bit of a dump of the United Copper Company's, no good, I'm thinking, but the fellow in charge is a friend of mine. He's got his wife there. They're nice people—or used to be. I haven't seen them for ten years. They say he drinks a little—well, we all do. Maybe you could write me how she—I mean, how he is getting on ? ' And he turned red. I saw how the land lay, and as a favour to him I said I would.

" It was eighty miles away, and I drifted in there one night on top of a tired cow-horse just at sundown. You know how purple—violet, really—those desert evenings are. There was violet stretching away as far as I could see, from the faint violet at my stirrups to the deep, almost black violet of the horizon. Way off to the north I could make out the shadow of some big hills that had been ahead of me all day. The town, what there was of it, lay in a little gully. Along its single street there were a few lights shining like small yellow flowers. I asked my way of a Mexican, and he showed me up to where the Whitneys—that name will do as well as any—lived, in a decent enough sort of bungalow, it would seem, above the gully. He left me there, and I went forward and rapped at the door. Light shone from between the cracks of a near-by shutter, and I could hear voices inside—a man's voice mostly, hoarse and high-pitched. Then a Chinaman opened the door for me and I had a look inside, into a big living-room beyond. It was civilised all right enough, pleasantly so to a man stepping out of two days of desert and Mexican adobes. At a glance I saw the rugs on the polished floor, and the Navajo blankets about, and a big table in the centre with a shaded lamp and magazines in rows ; but the man in riding-clothes standing before the empty fireplace wasn't civilised at all, at least not at that moment. I couldn't see the woman, only the top of her head above the back of a big chair, but as I came in I heard her say, ' Hush !—Jim !—please ! ' and I noticed that what I could see of her hair was of that fine true gold you so seldom find. The man stopped in the middle of a sentence and swayed on his feet, then he looked over at me and came toward me with a sort of bulldog, inquiring look. He was a big, red-faced, blond chap, about forty, I should say, who might once have been handsome. He wasn't now, and it didn't add to his beauty that he was quite obviously fairly drunk. ' Well ? ' he said, and blocked my way.

" ' I'm a friend of Henry Martin's,' I answered. ' I've got a letter for you.' I was beginning to get pretty angry.

" ' Henry Martin ? ' He laughed unsteadily. ' You'd better give it to my wife over there. She's his friend. I hardly know him.' I don't know when I'd seen a man I disliked as much at first sight.

" There was a rustle from the other side of the room, and Mrs. Whitney came toward us. I avoided her unattractive husband and took her hand, and I understood at once whatever civilising influences there were about the bungalow we were in. Did you ever do that—ever step out of nowhere, in a wild sort of country, and meet suddenly a man or a woman who might have come straight from a pleasant, well-bred room filled with books and flowers and quiet, nice people ? It's a sensation that never loses its freshness. Mrs. Whitney was like that. I wouldn't have called her beautiful ; she was better ; you knew she was good and

clean-cut and a thoroughbred the minute you saw her. She was lovely, too; don't misunderstand me, but you had more important things to think about when you were talking to her. Just at the moment I was wondering how any one who so evidently had been crying could all at once greet a stranger with so cordial a smile. But she was all that—all nerve; I don't think I ever met a woman quite like her—so fine, you understand."

¶

HARDY paused. "Have any of you chaps got a cigarette?" he asked; and I noticed that his hand, usually the steadiest hand imaginable, trembled ever so slightly. "Well," he began again, "there you are! I had tumbled into about as rotten a little, pitiful a little tragedy as you can imagine, there in a God-forsaken desert of Arizona, with not a soul about but a Chinaman, a couple of Scotch stationary engineers, an Irish foreman, two or three young mining men, and a score of Mexicans. Of course, my first impulse was to get out the next morning, to cut it—it was none of my business—although I determined to drop a line to Henry Martin; but I didn't go. I had a talk with Mrs. Whitney that night, after her attractive husband had taken himself off to bed, and somehow I couldn't leave just then. You know how it is, you drop into a place where nothing in the world seems likely to happen, and all of a sudden you realise that something *is* going to happen, and for the life of you you can't go away. That situation up on top of the hill couldn't last for ever, could it? So I stayed on. I hunted out the big Irish foreman and shared his cabin. The Whitneys asked me to visit them, but I didn't exactly feel like doing so. The Irishman was a fine specimen of his race, ten years out from Dublin, and everywhere else since that time; generous, irascible, given to great fits of gaiety and equally unexpected fits of gloom. He would sit in the evenings, a short pipe in his mouth, and stare up at the Whitney bungalow on the hill above.

"'That Jim Whitney's a divvle,' he confided to me once. 'Wan of these days I'll hit him over th' head with a pick and be hung for murther. Now, what in hell d'ye suppose a nice girl like that sticks by him for? If it weren't for her I'd 'a' reported him long ago. The scut!' And I remember that he spat gloomily.

"But I got to know the answer to that question sooner than I had expected. You see, I went up to the Whitneys' often, in the afternoon, or for dinner, or in the evening, and I talked to Mrs. Whitney a great deal; although sometimes I just sat and smoked and listened to her play the piano. She played beautifully. It was a treat to a man who hadn't heard music for two years. There was a little thing of Grieg's—a spring song, or something of the sort—and you've no idea how quaint and sad and appealing it was, and incongruous, with all its freshness and murmuring about water-falls and pine-trees, there, in those hot, breathless Arizona nights. Mrs. Whitney didn't talk much; she wasn't what you'd call a particularly communicative woman, but bit by bit I pieced together something continuous. It seems that she had run away with Whitney ten years before—Oh, yes! Henry Martin! That had been a schoolgirl affair. Nothing serious, you understand.

"But the Whitney matter had been different. She was greatly in love with him. And the family had disapproved. Some rich, stuffy Boston people, I gathered. But she had made up her mind and taken matters in her own hands. That was her way—a clean-cut sort of person—like a gold-and-white arrow; and now she was going to stick by her choice no matter what happened. There was the quirk in her brain; we all have a quirk somewhere, and that was hers. She felt that she had ruined his career; he had been a brilliant young engineer, but her family had kicked up the devil of a row and, as they were powerful enough, and nasty enough, had more or less hounded him out of the East. Of course, personally, I never thought he showed any of the essentials of brilliancy, but that's neither here nor there; she did, and she was satisfied that she owed him all she had. I suppose, too, there was some trace of a Puritan conscience back of it, some inherent feeling about divorce; and there was pride as well, a desire not to let that disgusting family of hers know into what ways her idol had fallen.

"Anyway, she was adamant—oh, yes, I made no bones about it, I up and asked her one night why she didn't get rid of the hound. So there she was, that white-and-gold woman, with her love of music, and her love of books, and her love of fine things, and her gentleness, and that sort of fiery, suppressed Northern blood,

shut up on top of an Arizona dump with a beast that got drunk every night and twice a day on Sunday. It was worse even than that. One night—we were sitting out on the veranda—her scarf slipped, and I saw a scar on her arm, near her shoulder." Hardy stopped abruptly and began to roll a little pellet of bread between his thumb and his forefinger; then his tense expression faded and he sat back in his chair.

"Let me have another cigarette," he said to Jarrick. "No. Wait a minute! I'll order some."

He called a waiter and gave his instructions. "You see," he continued, "when you run across as few nice women as I do that sort of thing is more than ordinarily disturbing. And then I suppose it was the setting, and her loneliness, and everything. Anyway, I stayed on. I got to be a little bit ashamed of myself. I was afraid that Mrs. Whitney would think me prompted by mere curiosity or a desire to meddle, so after a while I gave out that I was prospecting that part of Arizona, and in the mornings I would take a horse and ride out into the desert. I loved it, too; it was so big and spacious and silent and hot. One day I met Whitney on the edge of town. He was sober, as he always was when he had to be; he was a masterful brute, in his way. He stopped me and asked if I had found anything, and when I laughed he didn't laugh back. 'There's gold here,' he said. 'Lots of gold. Did you ever hear the story of the Ten Strike Mine? Well, it's over there.' He swept with his arm the line of distant hills to the north. The crazy Dutchman that found it staggered into Almuda, ten miles down the valley, just before he died; and his pockets were bulging with samples—pure gold, almost. Yes, by thunder! And that's the last they ever heard of it. Lots of men have tried—lots of men. Some day I'll go myself, surer than shooting.' And he let his hands drop to his sides and stared silently toward the north, a queer, dreamy anger in his eyes.

"I've seen lots of mining men, lots of prospectors, in my time, and it didn't take long to size up that look of his. 'Aha, my friend!' I said to myself. 'So you've got another vice, have you! It isn't only rum that's got a hold on you!' And I turned my horse into the town.

"But our conversation seemed to have stirred to the surface something in Whitney's brain that had been at work there a long time, for after that he would never let me alone about his Ten Strike Mine and the mountains that hid it. 'Over there!' he would say, and point to the north. From the porch of his bungalow the sleeping hills were plainly visible above the shimmering desert. He would chew on the end of a cigar and consider. 'It isn't very far, you know. Two days—maybe three. All we need's water. No water there—at least, none found. All those fellows who've prospected are fools. I'm an expert; so are you. I tell you, Hardy, let's do it! A couple of little old pack-mules! Eh? How about it? Next week? I can get off. God, I'd like money!' And he would subside into a sullen silence. At first I laughed at him; but I can tell you that sort of thing gets on your nerves sooner or later and either makes you bolt it or else go.

"At the end of two weeks I actually found myself considering the fool thing seriously. Of course, I didn't want to discover a lost gold-mine, that is, unless I just happened to stumble over it; I wanted to keep away from such things; they're bad; they get into a man's blood like drugs; but I've always had a hankering for a new country, and those hills, shining in the heat, were compelling—very compelling. Besides, I reflected, a trip like that might help to straighten Whitney up a little. I hadn't much hope, to be sure, but drowning men clutch at straws. It's curious what sophistry you use to convince yourself, isn't it? And then—something happened that for two weeks occupied all my mind."

Hardy paused, considered for a moment the glowing end of his cigarette, and finally looked up gravely; there was a slight hesitation, almost an embarrassment, in his manner. "I don't exactly know how to put it," he began. "I don't want you chaps to imagine anything wrong; it was all very nebulous and indefinite, you understand—Mrs. Whitney was a wonderful woman. I wouldn't mention the matter at all if it wasn't necessary for the point of my story; in fact, it is the point of my story. But there was a man there—one of the young engineers—and quite suddenly I discovered that he was in love with Mrs. Whitney, and I think—I never could be quite sure, but I think she was in love with him. It must have been one of those sudden things, a storm out of a clear sky, deluging two people before they were aware. I imagine it was brought to the surface by the chap's illness.

He had been out riding on the desert and had got off to look at something, and a rattlesnake had struck him—a big, dust-dirty thing—on the wrist and, very faint, he had galloped back to the Whitneys'. And what do you suppose she had done—Mrs. Whitney, that is? Flung herself down on him and sucked the wound! Yes, without a moment's hesitation, her gold hair all about his hand and her white dress in the dirt. Of course, it was a foolish thing to do, and not in the least the right way to treat a wound, but she had risked her life to do it; a slight cut on her lip—you understand? Afterward, she had cut the wound crosswise, put on a ligature, and then had got the man into the house some way and nursed him until he was quite himself again. I dare say he had been in love with her a long while without knowing it, but that clinched matters. Those things come overpoweringly and take a man, down in places like that—semi-tropical and lonely and lawless, with long, empty days and moonlit nights. Perhaps he told Mrs. Whitney; he never got very far, I am sure. She was a wonderful woman—but she loved him, I think. You can tell those things, you know; a gesture, an unavoidable look, a silence.

"Anyway, I saw what had happened and I was sorry, and for a fortnight I hung around, loath to go, but hating myself all the while for not doing so. And every day Whitney would come at me with his insane scheme. 'Over there! It isn't very far. Two days—maybe three. How about it? Eh?' and then that tense sweep of the arm to the north. I don't know what it was, weariness, disgust, irritation of the whole sorry plan of things, but finally, and to my own astonishment, I found myself consenting, and within two days Whitney had his crazy pack outfit ready. Mrs. Whitney had said nothing when we unfolded our intentions to her, nor did she say anything when we departed, but stood on the porch of the bungalow, her hand up to her throat, and watched us out of sight. I wondered what she was thinking about. The Voodoos—that was the name of the mountains we were heading for—had killed a good many men in their time."

¶

HARDY took a long and thoughtful sip from the glass in front of him before he began again. "I've knocked about a good deal in my life," he said; "I've been lost—once in the jungle; I've starved; I've reached the point where I've imagined horrors, heard voices, you understand, and seen great, bearded men mouthing at me—a man's pretty far gone when that happens to him—but that trip across the desert was the worst I've ever taken. By day it was all right, just swaying in your saddle, half asleep a good part of the time, the smell of warm dust in your nose, the three pack-mules plodding along behind; but the nights!—I tell you, I've sat about camp-fires up the Congo and watched big, oily black men eat their food, and I once saw a native village sacked, but I'd rather be tied for life to a West Coast nigger than to a man like Whitney. It isn't good for two people to be alone in a place like that and for one to hate the other as I hated him. God knows why I didn't kill him; I'd have to get up and leave the fire and go out into the night and, mind you, I'd be shuddering like a man with the ague under that warm, soft air.

"And he never for a minute suspected it. His mind was scarred with drink as if a worm had bored its slow way in and out of it. I can see him now, cross-legged, beyond the flames, big, unshaven, heavy-jowled, dirty, what he thought dripping from his mouth like the bacon drippings he was too lazy to wipe away. I won't tell you what he talked about; you know, the old thing; but not the way even the most wrong-minded of ordinary men talks; there was a sodden, triumphant deviltry in him that was appalling. He cursed the country for its lack of opportunity of a certain kind; he was like a hound held in leash, gloating over what he would do when he got back to the kennels of civilisation again. And all the while, at the back of my mind, was a picture of that white-and-gold woman of his, way back toward the south, waiting his return because she owed him her life for the brilliant career she had ruined. It made you sometimes almost want to laugh—insanely. I used to lie awake at night and pray whatever there was to kill him.

"I would have turned back, but I felt that every day I could keep him away from Los Pinos was a day gained for Mrs. Whitney. He was a dangerous maniac, too. The first day he behaved himself fairly well, but the second, after supper, when we had cleaned up, he began to fumble through the packs, and finally produced a bottle of brandy.

"'Fine camping stuff!' he announced. 'Lots of results for very little weight.'

"'Are you going to drink that?' I asked.

"'Oh, go to the devil!' he snapped. 'I've been out as much as you have.' I didn't argue with him further; I hoped if he drank enough the sun would get him. But the third night he upset the water-kegs, two of them. He had been carrying on some sort of weird celebration by himself, and finally staggered out into the desert, singing at the top of his lungs, and the first thing I knew he was down among the kegs, rolling over and over, and kicking right and left. The one that was open was gone; another he kicked the plug out of, but I managed to save about a quarter of its contents. The next morning I spoke to him about it. He blinked his red eyes and chuckled.

"'Poor sort of stuff, anyway,' he said.

"'Yes,' I agreed; 'but without it you would blow out like a candle in a dust storm.' After that we didn't speak to each other except when it was necessary.

"We were in the foot-hills of the Voodoos by now, and the next day we got into the mountains themselves—great, bare ragged peaks, black and red and dirty yellow, like the cooled-off slake of a furnace. Every now and then a dry gully came down from nowheres; and the only human thing one could see was occasionally, on the sides of one of these, a shivering, miserable, half-dead piñon—nothing but that, and the steel-blue sky overhead, and the desert behind us, shimmering like a lake of salt. It was hot—good Lord! The horn of your saddle burned your hand. That night we camped in a canyon, and the next day went still higher up, following the course of a rutted stream that probably ran water once in a year. Whitney wanted to turn east, and it was all a toss-up to me; the place looked unlikely enough, anyway, although you never can tell. I had settled into the monotony of the trip by now and didn't much care how long we stayed out. One day was like another—hot little swirls of dust, sweat of mules, and great black cliffs; and the nights came and went like the passing of a sponge over a fevered face. On the sixth day the tragedy happened. It was toward dusk, and one of the mules, the one that carried the water, fell over a cliff.

"He wasn't hurt; just lay on his back and smiled crossly; but the kegs and the bags were smashed to bits. I like mules, but I wanted to kill that one. It was quiet down there in the canyon — quiet and hot. I looked at Whitney and he looked at me, and I had the unpleasant, sudden realisation that he was a coward, added to his other qualifications. Yes, a coward! I saw it in his blurred eyes and the quivering of his bloated lips—stark dumb funk. That was bad. I'm afraid I lost my nerve, too; I made no excuses; fear is infectious. At all events, we tore down out of that place as if death was after us, the mules clattering and flapping in the rear. After a time I rode more slowly, but in the morning we were nearly down at the desert again; and there it lay before us, shimmering like a lake of salt—three days back to water.

"The next two days were rather a blur, as if a man were walking on a red-hot mirror that tipped up and down and tried to take his legs from under him. There was a water-hole a little to the east of the way we had come, and toward that I tried to head. One of the mules gave out, and staggered and groaned, and tried to get up again. I remember hearing him squeal, once; it was horrible. He lay there, a little black speck on the desert. Whitney and I didn't speak

The ARGOSY BOUND VOLUMES

THIS issue of The ARGOSY is the ninth. Readers who wish to have previous numbers bound, should forward their copies in batches of four to the Publisher, La Belle Sauvage, Ludgate Hill, E.C.4, together with remittances of 4s. 8d. for each set of four numbers.

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to each other at all, but I thought of those two kegs of water he had upset. Have you ever been thirsty—mortally thirsty, until you feel your tongue black in your mouth? It's queer what it does to you. Do you remember that little place—Zorn's—at college? We used to sit there sometimes on spring afternoons. It was cool and cavern-like, and through the open door one could see the breeze in the maple-trees. Well, I thought about that all the time; it grew to be an obsession, a mirage. I could smell the moss-like smell of bock beer; I even remembered conversations we had had. You fellows were as real to me as you are real to-night. It's strange, and then, when you come to, uncanny; you feel the sweat on you turn cold.

" We had ridden on in that way I don't know how long, snatching a couple of feverish hours of sleep in the night, Whitney groaning and mumbling horribly, when suddenly my horse gave a little snicker—low, the way they do when you give them grain—and I felt his tired body straighten up ever so little. ' Maybe,' I thought, and I looked up. But I didn't much care; I just wanted to crawl into some cool place and forget all about it and die. It was late in the afternoon. My shadow was lengthening. Too late, really, for much mirage; but I no longer put great stock in green vegetation and matters of that kind; I had seen too much of it in the last two days fade away into nothing—nothing but blistering, damned sand. And so I wouldn't believe the cool reeds and the sparkling water until I had dipped down through a little swale and was actually fighting my horse back from the brink.

" I knew enough to do that, mind you, and to fight back the two mules so that they drank just a little at a time—a little at a time; and all the while I had to wait, with my tongue like sand in my mouth. Over the edge of my horse's neck I could see the water just below; it looked as cool as rain. I was always a little proud of that—that holding back; it made up, in a way, for the funk of two nights earlier. When the mules and my horse were through I dismounted and, lying flat, bathed my hands, and then, a tiny sip at a time, began to drink. That was hard. When I stood up the heat seemed to have gone, and the breeze was moist and sweet with the smell of evening. I think I sang a little and waved my hands above my head and I remember I lay on my back and rolled a cigarette; and quite suddenly and without the slightest reason there were tears in my eyes. Then I began to wonder what had become of Whitney; I hadn't thought of him before. I got to my feet, and just as I did so I saw him come over the little rise of sand, swaying in his saddle, and trying, the fool, to make his horse run. He looked like a great scarecrow blown out from some Indian maize-field into the desert. His clothes were torn and his mask of a face was seamed and black from dust and sweat; he saw the water and let out one queer, hoarse screech and kicked at his horse with wabbling legs.

" ' Look out! ' I cried, and stepped in his way. I had seen this sort of thing before and knew what to expect; but he rode me down as if I hadn't been there. His horse tried to avoid me, and the next moment the sack of grain on its back was on the sands, creeping like a great, monstrous, four-legged thing toward the water. ' Stay where you are,' I said, ' and I'll bring you some.' But he only crawled the faster. I grabbed his shoulder. ' You fool! ' I said. ' You'll kill yourself! '

" ' Damn you! ' he blubbered. ' Damn you! ' And before I knew it, and with all the strength, I imagine, left in him, he was on his feet and I was looking down the barrel of his gun. It looked very round and big and black, too. Beyond it his eyes were regarding me; they were quite mad, there was no doubt about that, but, just the way a dying man achieves some of his old desire to will, there was definite purpose in them. ' You get out of my way,' he said, and began very slowly to circle me. You could hardly hear his words, his lips were so blistered and swollen.

" And now this is the point of what I am telling you." Hardy fumbled again for a match and relit his cigarette. " There we were, we two, in that desert light, about ten feet from the water, he with his gun pointing directly at my heart—and his hand wasn't trembling as much as you would imagine, either—and he was circling me step by step, and I was standing still. I suppose the whole affair took two minutes, maybe three, but in that time—and my brain was still blurred to other impressions—I saw the thing as clearly as I see it now, as clearly as I saw that great, swollen beast of a face. Here was the chance I had longed for, the hope I had lain awake at night and prayed for; between the man and death

I alone stood; and I had every reason, every instinct of decency and common sense, to make me step aside. The man was a devil; he was killing the finest woman I had ever met; his presence poisoned the air he walked in; he was an active agent of evil, there was no doubt of that. I hated him as I had never hated anything else in my life, and at the moment I was sure that God wanted him to die. I knew then that to save him would be criminal; I think so still. And I saw other considerations as well; saw them as clearly as I see you sitting here. I saw the man who loved Mrs. Whitney, and I saw Mrs. Whitney herself, and in my keeping, I knew, was all her chance for happiness, the one hope that the future would make up to her for some of the horror of the past. It would have been an easy thing to do; the most ordinary caution was on my side. Whitney was far larger than I and, even in his weakened condition—I was weak myself—stronger, and he had a gun that in a flash of light could blow me into eternity. And what would happen then? Why, when he got back to Los Pinos they would hang him; they would be only too glad of the chance; and his wife?—she would die; I knew it—just go out like a flame from the unbearableness of it all. And there wasn't one chance in a thousand that he wouldn't kill me if I made a single step toward him. I had only to let him go and in a few minutes he would be dead—as dead as his poor brute of a horse would be within the hour. I felt already the cool relief that would be mine when the black shadow of him was gone. I would ride into town and think no more of it than if I had watched a tarantula die. You see, I had it all reasoned out as clearly as could be; there was morality and common sense, the welfare of other people, the man's own good, really, and yet—well, I didn't do it."

"Didn't?" It was Jarrick who put the question a little breathlessly.

"No. I stepped toward him—so! One step, then another, very slowly, hardly a foot at a time, and all the while I watched the infernal circle of that gun, expecting it every minute to spit fire. I didn't want to go; I went against my will. I was scared, too, mortally scared; my legs were like lead—I had to think every time I lifted a foot—and in a queer, crazy way I seemed to feel two people, a man and a woman, holding me back, plucking at my sleeves. But I went. All the time I kept saying, very steady and quiet: 'Don't shoot, Whitney! D'you hear! Don't shoot or I'll kill you!' Wasn't it silly? Kill him! Why, he had me dead ten times before I got to him. But I suppose some trace of sanity was knocking at his drink-sodden brain, for he didn't shoot—just watched me, his red eyes blinking. So! One step at a time—nearer and nearer—I could feel the sweat on my forehead—and then I jumped. I had him by the legs, and we went down in a heap. He shot then; they always do! But I had him tied up with the rags of his own shirt in a trice. Then I brought him water in my hat and let him drink it, drop by drop. After a while he came to altogether. But he never thanked me; he wasn't that kind of a brute. I got him into town the morning of the second day and turned him over to his wife. So you see"—Hardy hesitated and looked at the circle of our faces with an odd, appealing look—"it *is* queer, isn't it? All mixed up. One doesn't know." He sank back in his chair and began to scratch, absent-mindedly, at a holder with a match.

The after-theatre crowd was beginning to come in; the sound of laughter and talk grew steadily higher; far off an orchestra wailed inarticulately.

"What became of them?" I asked.

Hardy looked up as if startled. "The Whitneys? Oh—she died—Martin wrote me. Down there, within a year. One would know it would happen. Like a flame I suppose—suddenly."

"And the man—the fellow who was in love with her?"

Hardy stirred wearily. "I haven't heard," he said. "I suppose he is still alive."

He leaned over to complete the striking of his match, and for an instant his arm touched a glass; it trembled and hung in the balance, and he shot out a sinewy hand to stop it, and as he did so the sleeve of his dinner jacket caught. On the brown flesh of his forearm I saw a queer, ragged white cross—the scar a snake bite leaves when it is cicatrised. I meant to avoid his eyes, but somehow I caught them instead. They were veiled and hurt.

Marriage, Manners and Man

MARRIAGE is a tie which hope makes beautiful, which happiness preserves, and which misfortune strengthens. ALIBERT.

IT (marriage) is an action of life like to a stratagem of war, wherein a man can err but once. If thy estate be good, match near home and at leisure; if weak, far off and quickly. WILLIAM CECIL (LORD BURGHLEY).

WEN you're a married man, Samivel, you'll understand a good many things as you don't understand now; but vether it is worth while goin' through so much to learn so little, as the charity boy said ven he got to the end of the alphabet, is a matter o' taste. DICKENS.

MARRIAGE is the great civiliser of the world. ROBT. HALL.

NOBODY can define precisely what love is, or the reason for that delightful persuasion that bliss is only to be found in double harness. IBSEN.

STRANGE to say what delight we married people have to see these poor folks decoyed into our condition. PEPYS.

IN our part of the world, where monogamy rules, to marry means to halve one's rights and to double one's duties. SCHOPENHAUER.

IN married life three is company and two none. OSCAR WILDE.

MARRIAGE hath in it less of beauty and more of safety than the single life; it hath more care but less danger; it is more merry and more sad; it is fuller of sorrows and fuller of joys. JEREMY TAYLOR.

'TIS just like a summer bird-cage in a garden; the birds that are without despair to get in; and the birds that are within despair and are in a consumption, for fear they shall never get out. WEBSTER.

Manners

THE basis of good manners is self-reliance . . . Those who are not self-possessed obtrude and pain us. EMERSON.

HE was the mildest-mannered man
That ever scuttled ship or cut a throat;
With such true breeding of a gentleman,
You never could divine his real thought. BYRON.

THERE is an oblique way of reproof, which takes off from the sharpness of it; and an address in flattery, which makes it agreeable, though never so gross. STEELE.

EVERYONE'S manners make his fortune. CORNELIUS NEPOS.

Man

MAN is an embodied paradox, a bundle of contradictions. C. C. COLTON.

WE fear all things as mortals, and we desire all things as if we were immortals. LA ROCHEFAUCAULD.

IN short, what is man in nature? Nothing in regards to the infinite, everything in regard to nothing, something in between nothing and all. PASCAL.

OH, vanity of vanities!
How wayward the decrees of Fate are!
How very weak the very wise,
How very small the very great are! THACKERAY.

THE doctor sees mankind in all its weaknesses; the lawyer in all its wickedness; the theologian in all its stupidity. SCHOPENHAUER.

The Scrumptious Girl

A very rum game for a very good stake

By ROBERT BLATCHFORD

YOU must know that the Old Scuts was lyin' near the borders o' the Rajah of Jeypoor's territories; an' the colonel an' officers o' the Scuts an' the rajah got as thick as thieves, an' was continual a-dinin' an' visitin', turn about, an' what more nateral than they should take to gamblin' to kill time, seein' as 'ow in Inja Time 'as a pair o' club-feet, and moves always at the slow march.

Wherefor they played 'igh an' they played low, an' they played 'ell generally; but the rajah 'e always seemed bored, an' the 'igher the stakes the boreder 'e got, until at last 'e ups an' says as European games were too slow, an' 'e'd be glad if the officers would pass their words for to take 'im on at a country game, for a stake worth 'avin'.

Well, old Strapper, the colonel o' the Scuts, wasn't goin' to be bluffed by a native, so 'e passes 'is word. But when 'im an' 'is officers learned what the rajah 'ad let 'em in for, they put up their thumbs right solem-*ly*.

For, says 'e: "You Sahibs 'as the fine men," 'e says, "an' I 'as the fine women. Let the stakes be a woman on my side an' on your side a soldier. If you wins, the woman is yours. If I wins, the soldier enters my service."

"But," says the colonel, "the soldiers isn't my soldiers; they belongs to John Company."

"Then," says the rajah, "I will leave the men I win out on parole, an' you must buy their discharge, for," says 'e, "you 'ave passed your word," an' 'e grinned somethin' 'orrible.

"An' what's the game?" says old Tommy Strapper.

"The game," says the rajah, "is a trial o' strength atween one o' your soldiers an' one o' my women." An' with that he unfolded the rules o' the game; an' a very rum game it were.

So, to make a long story short, the game was to set an English soldier on sentry in the coort-yard o' the rajah's pallis, the rajah an' the colonel seein' fair through keyholes, an' then to send in a pretty girl to coax the soldier's musket off him. The gel to use no weepons, nor drugs; nothin' but female bedevilments, fair an' square. An' if the gel got the arms off him within the hour, the man was forfeit; but if not, the colonel took the gel. Of course, the sentry was to know nothin' of the game, much less as 'is commandin' officer's eye was on 'im: so that 'e'd nothin' to stand on but 'is solderin'.

Well, when old Strapper an' the officers tumbled to the game, they looked seven ways at once, for they knew the Old Scuts pretty well, an' devil a man of 'em was fit to stand his corner. But at last they picked out a raw-boned, hard-faced, canny Scotchman, named Angus M'Allister; an' they put up a prayer, an' sent 'im into action.

Angus was posted at twelve midnight; an' there was the colonel an' the rajah, with their eyes glued to a brace o' keyholes; an' there was Angus p'radin' up an' down, an' never a move out of the enemy till the *ghurry* struck the half-hour.

Soon as the *ghurry* struck the half-hour, the curtains opens, an' out comes that *Scrumshus Gel!*

Directly old Strapper sees 'er, 'is eyes strikes a light, an' the clock of 'is 'art goes backwards. Directly Angus sees 'er, 'e opens 'is big mouth, same as if 'e'd been for doctor's inspection.

She—was—the—most—*scrumshus* gel as ever fell in love with a lookin'-glass.

She 'ad an 'ed of 'air like a mermaid; long an' black an' curly. She 'ad flesh like strawberries an' cream, eyes like flashlights, a figure like a hangel, and a mouth like a cut cherry.

There was more live woman to 'er than ever old Tommy Strapper see on one pair o' feet, an' yet she were as dainty as if she'd growed in a hot'ouse on a stem.

The Scrumptious Girl

She was dressed in a loose sort of—what's-his-name, made o' goold cloth, as you thought you could see through, though you wasn't sartin, an' round her waist she wore a belt o' silver chain, with a diamond clasp.

So Angus stood to attention an' stared as if 'e'd been struck so; and the gel turned half-left an' brought her bonny head to the "port" an' looked at 'im under 'er be-yewtiful black eyebrows an' sighed.

Angus told after, as she did it as if 'er eyebrows 'ad been bows an' 'er eyes the arrers an' she'd been takin' aim to shoot 'im. Anyhow, she did shoot 'im. She shot 'im dead at the first fire an' she knowed it.

She stood still long enough to let the sigh melt away—as a sportsman does the smoke of 'is rifle—an' then she come forrard, movin' as if she'd been steppin' to a slow waltz; an' 'er splendiferous eyes on Scotty's face an' 'er whole self seemin' to shine an' ripple all over, as a graylin' does swimmin' slow upstream; an' at last she halts right opposite to him, where 'e'd stood like a moonstruck Lascar, an' there she stops with 'er arms 'anging down an' 'er long eyelashes a-lyin' on 'er cheeks like black silk fringe on a peach; an' 'er breast heaves, same as two little smooth waves a-risin' outer deep water when the sea's calm, an' she gives another sigh. Angus said one o' them sighs an' a slice o' brown bread would feed a soldier for a day.

Well, the rajah says, soft, to the colonel: "I bet you a thousand rupees she disarms him afore the *ghurry* strikes once." But old Strapper couldn't speak for the water-brash.

As for poor Angus, 'e stood as stiff and as stoopid as if 'e'd been a wooden Scotchman outside a snuffshop; an' the silence was that strong as you might a' heerd the grass grow.

Well, the scrumshus gel lifts 'er eyes up, very, very slow, like the sun risin' out of a silver lake, an' clasps 'er 'ands under 'er dimpled chin an' looks as if she was a-goin' to say the Doxology, but never speaks. An' Angus, he gives a little short sigh; an' old Strapper says: "Damn."

Then the gel took a pace of about six inches forrard an' stood a-tiptoe with 'er little 'ands clasped under 'er ear, an' 'er throat a-swellin' an' 'er breast a-heavin' an' 'er eyes a-glowin' an' a-sparklin' an' expandin' an' contractin'; an' at last she opens her cherry-ripe lips to speak.

An' there was old Strapper in a blue funk, an' Angus fixed with his mouth ajar an' the 'ole weight of 'is body on the forepart of 'is feet, as if 'er words 'ud be butterflies an' 'e must stand by to catch 'em.

The rajah 'e 'umps 'isself be'ind 'is keyhole an' the gel gives a curly-wurly smile which made Scotty feel as if a cold watchguard was bein' twiddled down 'is back; an' she spoke in a voice sweet enough an' wooin' enough to charm an oyster out of 'is bed; an' the words she said was: "*Oh!* you *pretty* soldier."

An' at that Angus looked as silly as a Dutch doll an' all 'e could say was: "Hech!"

Immejately after, the gel takes a teeny step nearer, so that he could feel the warmth of her flesh an' smell the scent in her 'air, an' she says: "Pretty, pretty soldier; *my* soldier," an' opens 'er arms. But directly Angus made to fall into 'em she sprung back like a fencin' instructor an' she screws 'er mouth into the shape of a moss rosebud and moves 'er face as if she meant to bore a hole in 'im, an' 'er eyes all the while a-shinin' like the dawn star in a dewy mornin'.

Thereupon Angus went rampin' ravin' luny an' forgot the Mutiny Act an' the Board of Orders an' 'is Catechism an' 'is own Christian name; an' she sees 'e's a beaten man an' she takes a hold of 'is musket; an' she kisses 'im.

An' the next thing Angus knew he was swayin' about in the middle of the lawn, feelin' around for something to hold on to an' with a taste o' June roses an' new honey on 'is lips an' a swarm o' bees a-buzzin' through 'is dizzy head; an' 'is arms took off him and the scrumshus gel clean vanished.

Next minute Angus gets his wits awake an', with the fear o' God an' a general coort-martial afore 'im, rushes through the curtains at the end o' the green an' tumbles over 'is own musket.

There it stood in a silver lance-rack, with the bayonet fixed an' on the bayonet a strip o' paper with these words: "As the tides to the moon an' the steel to the magnet, the fool is to the woman."

Naterally Angus was glad to get his arms back; but he was jumpin' wild at bein' fooled by a gel an' you may be sure 'e didn't show 'is billy-doo.

Of course, there was a tremenjos clam-jamfry in the officers' mess and old Strapper ate the nails off his fingers an' swore till the messroom smelt o' sulphur. But 'e'd give 'is word an' 'ad to stand by it. The rub was which man to send next. The colonel knew the Scuts pretty well an', after seein' the scrumshus gel, 'e knowed 'e could tell how long this fool-rogue of a game would last by simply tottin' up the number o' rank an' file on the p'rade state.

"It's all up, Cutler," 'e says to the senior major; "the mermaid'll beat us in detail and we'll march back to headquarters like the fools we are, with never a musket to trail behind us."

But old Cutler 'adn't seen the scrumshus gel an' 'e said M'Allister was a soft-hoofed Highland cuddie an' bade the colonel cheer up an' send an older man.

So as 'e said, so was it done. They sent up an old buff-stick with four badges an' a figure like a rake, who'd been twice married an' had a wife an' seven children in barracks; an' he mounted guard an' the colonel went to his keyhole an' the scrumshus gel came in an' bent 'er black silk bows an' aimed at 'im with 'er diamond arrers an' waltzed forrard an' sighed an' said: "Oh, you pretty soldier!" an' kissed 'is old dundy-grey shiver-defreeze moustache an' took 'is musket off 'im an' left it with a billy-doo on the point o' the bayonet or ever the *ghurry* struck the quarter.

An' as it was with Angus an' 'im, so it was with five other old die-hards that follered 'im; an' the rajah smiled an' smiled an' the colonel swore an' swore an' the officers' faces looked as if they was twelve hours at sea in dirty weather.

An' at last old Strapper says to the doctor, says 'e: "O'Grady," 'e says, "we'll 'ave to try the rules o' contraries an' send an Irishman."

"Bedad," says the doctor, "it's of no use sendin' the bhoys on such a sarvice at all, colonel dear; ye moight as good marrch the whole Catholic church-party into the pallis an' turn them over to the rajah, lock, stock an' bar'l," he says, "for sorra the one of them but would surrindther his sowl to a camel if it had a long frock on it."

Then old Strapper stamped about the orderly-room as if he'd got a pair o' new boots on an', says 'e: "Damnation, O'Grady," 'e says, "are we to chuck up the sponge to a Christy-minstrel king? An' where's your Irish wit?" 'e says.

"Aisy, colonel," says the doctor. "Me Oirish wit's in the only place where ye'll foind such a commodithy and that's in me Oirish head, acushlah. An' let me tell ye 'tis the Oirish brigade that'll save this day," an' then the doctor clucked an' spluttered an' chow, chow, chowed an' yow, yow, yowed all over the shop an' couldn't speak for laughin'. But at last 'e gives old Strapper the griffin; an' directly old Strapper got the elevation 'e said the doctor was a genius an' 'e laid 'isself down on the orderly-room floor an' howled till he broke 'is braces.

Now, what was it the doctor said to the colonel? It was just this: "Colonel," 'e says, "the Owld Scuts are all men an' be that token they're all fools whenever a woman can get within range of 'em."

"Bah!" says old Strapper, "did I send for you to tell me that? The question is: Have I a man in my regiment can face this witch an' not melt like sugar in a punch-bowl?"

"Ye have not," says the doctor; "but, colonel, dimond cut dimond, an' if ye mean to beat this mermaid at her own game take a hint from me."

"What is it?" the colonel says.

"Just this," says the doctor; "keep yer men in barracks an' send up a woman in regimentals."

With that old Strapper laughed, as I said, an' then 'im an' the doctor lays their heads together an' decides to send for Kate O'Flatherty an' ask 'er to save the honour of the ridgment.

Kate was one o' the knapsack breed, born an' reared in the Old Scuts, wheer 'er father 'ad been a sergeant. She was tall enough for the Grenadier company, as thin as a lance, an' with more corners on her than there is on Salisbury spire. She'd a head of hair like a windy sunset an' a mouth like the Bolan Pass. 'Er feet was as flat as long-scrubbers an' she'd a suet-pudden complexion an' two little black eyes like currants, but so sharp they seemed to prick you.

Well, Kate ambushed her charms in the uniform o' the Scuts an' was posted in the coortyard o' the rajah's pallis, with no farther orders but to walk about in a brisk an' soldier-like manner an' do nothin' contrary to good order an' military discipline. But when she was posted old Tommy Strapper came an' whispered to her that if she turned up trumps he'd promote Angus,

M'Allister full sergeant next mornin' an' order 'im to marry Kate the day after an' all the officers should dance at the weddin' an' the 'appy couple should 'ave a thousand rupees an' a month's leave to spend it in.

" An', Kate," 'e says, callin' 'er by 'er Christian name, " I cannot tell you what it means," 'e says, " but for the love o' God and the regimental colour, defend yourself against all comers."

" Sorr," says Kate, " I don't know phwat manner o' thing this sacrit sarvice may be; but, be the grace of God, sorr," she says, " if the Earl of Hell an' all 'is sheriffs should come forninst me they'll mate their match." And with that she slings 'er rifle into the shoulder and, with a smile that would frighten a bulldog, she begins her sentry-go.

So me bold Kate marched about in quick time, as stiff as her own ramrod; an' the colonel and the rajah took up position an' the *ghurry* struck the half-hour an' the curtains slid silently back an' there stood the scrumshus gel.

Kate was powerful surprised at the sight of her; for, in the first place, she wasn't at all what she expected an', in the second place, Kate would have preferred the distinguished guest she'd mentioned to a pretty woman any time, an' it was easy to see by her manner that she wasn't at all pleased. For she began to bridle and sniff like a house-cat when it sees a strange dog comin' up the garden. An' she gives the gel a hard stare an' comes to the " port " an' calls: " Halt, who comes there? "

Kate challenged so fierce an' 'er voice 'ad such a scissor-edge to it that the girl was startled an' forgot to pose 'erself afore the curtain an' take aim with 'er bows an' arrers. An' old Strapper sniggers an' says to the rajah: " A thousand rupees," 'e says, " as my sentry holds his arms."

" Done," says the rajah and then the scrumshus gel pulls 'erself together an' says in a voice like a whisperin' angel comfortin' a babe in its sleep: " Friend."

With that Kate looks as hard as a brick chimney an' comes down to the charge with a tell, an' says, in a tone like the scrape of a key on a slate: " Shtand, friend, or I'll be afther pokun fun at yez wid me sharrup steel wit."

Well, the gel looks a bit queer at this new kind of a welcome an' the expression of cold-drawn contempt on Kate's ugly phiz and she turns on the curly-wurly smile an' sidles round to 'er right front, saying: " Coo, coo, coo," with such seducin' sweetness that she nearly drawed old Strapper through 'is keyhole.

But Kate was built on different lines an' what tickled the colonel only made her mad, so she beats the double attack with her solid Mullingar foot an' says, in 'er most disdainsome manner: " Coo, coo, coo," she says an' it was like a crow mockin' a nightingale. " Coo, coo, coo," says Kate, " ye bowld-face besom, do yez take me for a pijun? "

Thereupon the gel takes a pretty little run forrard, like a thrush on a lawn, an' turns her meltin' eyes up at Kate's freckles an' clasps 'er baby 'ands under 'er right ear an' says: " Oh, you *pretty* soldier."

Well, at that Kate fairly crackled with scorn. " Don't be makin' shape's eyes at me, ye mechanical waxwork," says Kate. " I'm not a papeshow."

The girl smiles again and puts 'er 'ead a one side like a canary an' makes 'er mouth into a rosebud an' proceeds to play at borin' a hole in Kate, who was about as flirtative a woman as a marble angel on a tombstone.

" Boy Saint Anthony," says Kate, " if the thing o' the fair isn't afther thryin' the comether upon me. Git along home wid yez, Jezebel; phwat are yez doin' here in yer bathun-gownd? Black shame on yez; this is not a shwimmun-bath."

Well, when old Strapper heard bonny Kate open fire, he laughed till his teeth came loose; but the rajah turned more colours than the dog-star on a winter's night, an' the sweat run down 'is face as if 'e'd been the village blacksmith.

The gel stood firm an' rolled 'er sparklin' eyes an' swelled 'er throat up like a blackcap on an apple-branch an' began gurglin' out: " Gloo, gloo, gloo," with enough o' warm tenderness to melt a snow-man.

But it didn't melt Kate a fragment. She got as raw as a sore heel an' says she: " Ye gogglin', gugglin', gawky creature," she says, " if yez come widin rache o' me Oi'll—Oi'll *shmack* yez." An' she lifted up 'er big left hand, as red and bony as a shin o' beef, an' the gel jumped back with a ballet-dancer's bound an' stood wide-eyed an' panting' like a scared deer.

Then Kate laughed, with a noise of shakin' a bag o' marbles, an' the colonel hitches up his sword-belt an' chuckles, an' the rajah says something through 'is teeth

in Hindustanee; an' the gel drops a curtsy like a countess an' runs out of the coortyard an' comes back with a lute.

Kate gives a scornful snort and shoulders 'er arms an' commences marchin' up an' down an' the gel kneels on the grass and sings an' plays; an' every note o' the lute was like a kiss, an' every word she sang was like a cuddle, an' Kate moved back an' to about as much concerned as if she'd been the running man at Wimbledon.

After a time the *ghurry* strikes the quarter an' the gel sighs an' puts down the lute and begins to dance. She danced nautch-girl fashion at first, showin' 'er limbs an' figure an' makin' great play with her long black 'air; but Kate stood at ease and made cuttin' remarks.

"Bad cess to yez," said Kate, "it's the saucy slut yez are. Phwy don't yez go an' dance to that disreputable owld foostherer of a rajah? D'yez hear me, imperence? Go an' cut yer scandalous capers afore yer wrinkled-faced owld guttapercha king."

When the rajah heard that, his eyes turned innards an' 'e chawed 'is bottom lip like a quid; but old Strapper was delighted.

Well, the gel danced quicker an' more free. She danced afore Kate like a kitten chasin' leaves, like a titmouse on a twig, like a butterfly over a flower-bed, or a troutlet in a weir, with her little feet a-trippin' an' glancin' an' 'er white arms wavin' an' 'er 'air spread out like a black silk fan an' 'er eyes invitin' an' teasin' and coaxin' an' 'er goold frock a-foldin' an' spreadin' an' shadin' an' shinin', till you couldn't tell whether it hid more than it showed, or showed more than it hid; an' ever as she danced she kept drawin' in nearer an' nearer to Kate until the goold skirt flicked the gun-sling, when flop! down went Kate at the "receive cavalry" an' the gel sprung back an' for a minute stood lookin' wishful an' timid at Kate, as a child will look to know: "Did I do that nicely?" an' Kate put on a scowl that would wither a ricefield an' she says, sarcastic: "Is that *all*, me Lady Godiva? Are yez not afther woindin' up by turrnin' a cartwheel or standun' on yer head—seein' yez 'ave gone so far already?"

Then the gel drops down on 'er knees an' clasps 'er 'ands an' big tears runs down 'er face an' 'er eyes looks as deep as the Lake o' Lucerne an' she sobs out: "Forgive me! I love you," an' then she smiles like a welcomin' angel at the Goolden Gate an' shows two rows o' teeth like milk-stones an' a mouth as clean an' clear as a claret-glass.

But Kate says only: "Ye're a liar," an' frowns 'er rusty eyebrows into an Austrian knot.

Time was a-flyin' an' the gel knew it. She crept in on 'er knees a bit nearer the point o' the bayonet an' gives a look o' beseechment at the O'Flaherty an' says in a fearsome whisper: "Save me, soldier, save me, save me."

An' Kate curls 'er nose, which was naterally adapted for that purpose, an' makes answer: "Save yez? Phwy don't yez see a docthor, if there's anythin' wrong wid yer insoide?"

An' old Strapper says to 'imself: "She's a jewel," but which o' the ladies 'e meant I leave you to guess.

You understand the articles of agreement said the game must close at 12-30 a.m., an' it was now close on the time. The gel saw the case was gettin' desperate an' she stood up an' pouted an' asked, in a downcast way: "Don't you think I'm pretty?"

That roused Kate's dander. "Pretty, is ut?" she says, with a snarl. "Why, ye wasp-waisted, shape-eyed, shrivel-shanked, face-painted, schrim-shankin' nanny-goat, sure I'd make a purtier gurrl out of a butcher's shop." An' then Kate stopped for breath an' flattered erself that was rather neat. But the fault of it was the gel didn't understand one word of it, but just thought Kate looked a bit pleasanter an' had been payin' compliments. So she 'olds out 'er arms an' warbles in 'er throat an' says "Kiss me, kiss me, kiss me."

That finished it. All at once the devil put it into Kate's head about Angus M'Allister havin' been on this very post an' she left the hold of her musket an' jumped up with her eyes snappin' like red-hot metal an' her yaller tusks stickin' out like a sea-horse and she lets up an Irish yell an' the scrumshus gel darts for the door like a bee for 'is hive an' the colonel gives a buck-jump an' the *ghurry* strikes the half-hour.

The rajah 'e turns to the colonel an' says 'e: "Is that a soldier?"

"Yes," says old Strapper; "that's an Irish soldier—the best soldier in my regiment, begad, an' if you won him he'd damn'd soon be in command of the pallis."

So the rajah see he was done; for, by rights o' the articles o' war, 'e'd lost the

scrumshus gel; but old Strapper 'ad seen enough of *'er* an' so made a great favour of exchangin' 'er back for the men what he'd lost and both sides cried quits.

Kate's was a great wedding' an, when it was over an' the bride passed by the quarter guard, old Moses Appleby, as was the second to fall under the charms of the scrumshus gel, he stood to the shoulder to Katie an' ever after that it was an understood thing as she never was to pass a sentry, nor be passed by a soldier o' the Old Scuts, without receivin' the salute as was due to 'er rank as the best man in the 'ole bloomin' battalion.

As for Sergeant M'Allister, I 'ope 'e was 'appy; but it is said as all through 'is service, if you wanted to 'ear Angus fetch up a sigh out o' deep soundin's, all you 'ad to do was to mention the scrumshus gel.

Young Moon—Young Love

DUSK falls and the stars shine,
A dewy quiet holds the garden close,
Enchanted droop the columbine
And the rose.

Quiet as a small mouse
And as grey, mysterious, sunk deep
In ghostly shadows, the old house
Seems asleep.

A voice calls and a window gleams,
White arms fling wide the leaden-chequered glass,
A sudden flood of amber streams
To the wet grass.

A star falls and a clock chimes
In the village. The house's once-bright eye
Is closed. Under the flowering limes—
A sigh.

Night falls and up the sky
Clambers the young moon. Young moon, oh stay.
One silver moment more of ecstacy!
God—It is day!

PHILIP MACER-WRIGHT.

The Five of Swords

A duel—and an Englishman's honour

By G. K. CHESTERTON

IT was doubtless a strange coincidence that the two friends, the Frenchman and the Englishman, should have argued about that particular subject on that particular morning. The coincidence may perhaps appear less incredible to a philosophic mind if I add that they had argued about that subject every morning through the whole month of the walking tour that they took in the country south of Fontainebleau. Indeed, it was this repetition and variety of aspect that gave the more logical and patient mind of the Frenchman the occasion of his final criticism.

"My friend," he said, "you have told me many times that you can make no sense of the French duel. Permit me the observation that I can make no sense of the English criticism of the French duel. When we discussed it yesterday, for instance, you twitted me with the affair of old Le Mouton with that Jew journalist who calls himself Vallon. Because the poor old Senator got off with a scratch on the wrist, you called it a farce."

"And you can't deny it was a farce," replied the other stolidly.

"But now," proceeded his friend, "because we happen to pass the Chateau d'Orage, you dig up the corpse of the old count who was killed there, God knows when, by a vagabond Austrian soldier of fortune, and tell me with a burst of British righteousness that it was a hideous tragedy."

"Well, and you can't deny it was a tragedy," repeated the Englishman. "They say the poor young countess couldn't live there in the shadow of it, and has sold the chateau and gone to Paris."

"Paris has its religious consolations," said the Frenchman, smiling somewhat austerely. "But I think you are unreasonable. A thing cannot be bad because it is too dangerous and too safe. If the duel is bloodless you call our poor French swordsman a fool. If it end in bloodshed, what do you call him?"

"I call him a bloody fool," replied the Englishman.

The two national figures might have served to show how real is nationality, and how independent it is of race; or at least of the physical types commonly associated with race. For Paul Forain was tall, thin and fair, but French to the finger-tips, to the point of his imperial or the points of his long, narrow shoes, and in nothing more French than in a certain seriousness of curiosity that lifted his brow in a permanent furrow; you could see him thinking. And Harry Monk was short, sturdy and dark, and yet exuberantly English—English in his grey tweeds and in his short brown moustache; and in nothing so English as in a complete absence of curiosity, so far as was consistent with courtesy. He carried the humour, and especially the good humour, of the English social compromise with him like a costume; just as one might fancy his grey tweeds carried the grey English weather with him everywhere through those sunny lands. They were both young, and both professors at a famous French college—the one of jurisprudence, the other of English; but the former, Forain, had specialised so much in certain aspects of criminal law that he was often consulted on particular criminal problems. It was certain views of his about murder and manslaughter that had led to the recurrent disagreement about the duel. They commonly took their holidays together, and had just breakfasted at the inn of the Seven Stars half a mile along the road behind them.

Dawn had broken over the opposite side of the valley and shone full on the side on which their road ran. The ground fell towards the river in a series of tablelands like a terraced garden, and on the one just above them were the neglected grounds and sombre façade of the old château, flanked to left and right by an equally sombre façade of firs and pines, deployed interminably like the lost lances of an army long

fallen into dust. The first shafts of the sun, still tinged with red, gleamed on a row of glass frames for cucumbers or some such vegetables, suggesting that the place was at least lately inhabited, and warmed the dark diamonded casements of the house itself, here and there turning a diamond into a ruby. But the garden was overgrown with clumps of wood almost as accidental as giant mosses, and somewhere in its melancholy maze, they knew the sinister Colonel Tarnow, an Austrian soldier, since not unsuspected of being an Austrian spy, had thrust his blade into the throat of Maurice d'Orage, the last lord of that place. The path descended, and the view over the hedge was soon shut out by a great garden wall so loaded with ivies and ancient vines that it looked more like a hedge than a wall.

"I know you've been out yourself, and I know you're far from being a brute yourself," conceded Monk, continuing the conversation. "For my own part, however much I hated a man, I don't fancy I should ever want to kill him."

"I don't know that I did want to kill him," answered the other. "It would be truer to say I wanted him to kill me. You see, I wanted him to be *able* to kill me. That is what is not understood. To show how much I would stake on my side of the quarrel—hallo! Who on earth is this?"

On the ivied wall above had appeared a figure, almost black against the morning sky, so that they could see nothing of its face, but only its one frenzied gesture. The next moment it had leapt from the wall and stood in their path.

"Are you doctors, either of you?" cried the unknown. "Anyhow, you must come and help—a man's been killed."

They could see now that the figure was that of a slim young man whose dark hair and dark clothes showed the abrupt disorder only seen in what is commonly orderly. One curl of his burnished black hair had been plucked across his eye by an intercepting branch, and he wore pale yellow gloves, one of which was burst across the knuckles.

"A man killed?" repeated Monk. "How was he killed?"

The yellow-gloved hand made a despairing movement.

"Oh, the wretched old tale!" he cried. "Too much wine, too many words, and the end next morning. But God knows we never meant it to go so far as this!"

With one of the lightning movements that lay hidden behind his rather dry dignity, Forain had already scaled the low wall and was standing on it, and his English friend followed with equal activity and more unconcern. As soon as they stood there they saw on the lawn below the sight that made so wild and yet apt a commentary on their own controversy.

¶

THE group on the lawn included three other men in black frockcoats and top hats, excluding the messenger of misfortune, whose own silk hat lay rolled at random by the wall over which he had leapt. He had evidently leapt it, by the way, with an impetuosity that spoke of a real reaction of horror or repentance, for Forain noticed, only a yard or two along the garden wall, a garden door, which, though doubtless disused, rustily barred and blotched with lichen, would have been the natural exit of a more normal moment. But the eye was very reasonably riveted on the two figures, clad only in white shirts and trousers, round whom the rest revolved, and who must have crossed swords a moment before. One of these stood with the rapier still poised in his hand, a mere streak of white, which a keen eye might have seen to end in a spot of red. The other white-shirted figure lay like a white rag on the green turf, and a sword of the same pattern, a somewhat antiquated one, lay gleaming in the grass where it had fallen from his hand. One of his black-coated seconds was bending over him, and as the strangers approached lifted a livid face, a face with spectacles and a black triangular beard.

"It's too late," he said. "He's gone."

The man still holding the sword cast it down with a wordless sound more shocking than a curse. He was a tall, elegant man, with an air of fashion even in his duelling undress; his face, with a rather fine aquiline profile, looked whiter against red hair and a red pointed beard. The man beside him put a hand upon his shoulder and seemed to push him a little, perhaps urging him to fly. This witness, in the French phrase, was a tall, portly man with a long black beard cut as if in the square pattern of his long black frockcoat, and having, somewhat incongruously, a monocle screwed into one eye. The last of the group, the second of the slayer's formal backers, stood motionless

and somewhat apart from the rest—a big man, much younger than his comrades, and with a classical face like a statue and almost as impassive as a statue's. By a movement common to the whole tragic company, he had removed his top hat at the final announcement, as if at a funeral, and the effect gave to English eyes a slight shock, for the young man's hair was cropped so close and so colourless that he might almost have been bald. The fashion was common enough in France, yet it seemed incongruous to the man's youth and good looks. It was as if Apollo were shaved as an Eastern hermit.

" Gentlemen," said Forain at last, " since you have brought me into this terrible business, I must be plain. I am in no position to be pharisaic. I have all but killed a man myself, and I know that the riposte can be almost past control. I am not," he added, with a faint touch of acidity, " a humanitarian, who would have three men butchered with the axe of the guillotine because one has fallen by the sword. I am not an official, but I have some official influence; and I have, if I may say so, a reputation to lose. You must at least convince me that this affair was clean and inevitable like my own, otherwise I must go back to my friend the innkeeper of the Seven Stars, who will put me in communication with another friend of mine, the chief of the police."

And without further apology, he walked across the lawn and looked down at the fallen figure, a figure peculiarly pathetic because plainly younger than any of the survivors, even than his second who had run for help. There was no hair on the pale face; the hair on the head was very fair and brushed in a way which Monk, with a new shock of sympathy, recognised as English. There was no doubt of the death; a brief examination showed that the sword had been sent straight through the heart.

The big man with the big black beard broke the silence in reply:

" I will thank you, sir, for your candour, since I am, in some melancholy sense, your host on this occasion. I am Baron Bruno, owner of this house and grounds, and it was here at my table that the mortal insult was given. I owe it to my unfortunate friend Le Caron "—and he made a gesture of introduction towards the red-bearded swordsman, " to say it was a mortal insult, and followed by a direct challenge. It was a charge of cheating at cards, and it was clinched by one of cowardice. I mean no harshness to the dead, but something is due to the living."

Monk turned to the dead man's seconds. " Do you support this? " he demanded.

" I suppose it's all right," said the young man with the yellow gloves. " There were faults on both sides."

Then he added abruptly: " My name is Waldo Lorraine, and I'm ashamed to say I am the fool who brought my poor friend here to play. He was an Englishman, Hubert Crane, whom I met in Paris, and meant, heaven knows, only to give a good time! And the only service I've done him is to be his second in this bloody ending. Dr. Vandam here, being also a stranger in the house, kindly acted as my colleague. The duel was regular enough, I must fairly say, but the quarrel was——" He paused, a shadow of shame darkening his dark face. " I have to confess I was no judge of it, and have no memory but a sort of nightmare. In plain words, I had drunk too much to know or care."

Dr. Vandam, the pale man in the spectacles, shook his head mournfully, still staring at the corpse.

" I can't help you," he said. " I was at the Seven Stars, and only came in time to arrange for the fight."

" My own fellow-witness, M. Valence," observed the baron, indicating the man with the cropped hair, " will ratify my version of the dispute."

" Had he any papers? " asked Forain after a pause. " May I examine the body? "

There was no opposition, and, after searching the dead man and his waistcoat and coat that lay on the lawn, the investigator at last found a single letter, short but confirmatory, so far as it went, of the story told him. It was signed " Abraham Crane," and was plainly from the dead man's father in Huddersfield; indeed, Monk was able to recognise the name as that of a noted manufacturing magnate in the north. It merely concerned business on which the young man had been sent to Paris, apparently to confirm some contract with the Paris branch of the firm of Miller, Moss and Hartman; but the rather sharp adjurations to avoid the vanities of the French capital suggested that perhaps the father had some hint of the dissipations that had brought the son to his death. One thing only in this

very commonplace letter puzzled the inquirer not a little. It ended by saying that the writer might himself be coming to France to hear the upshot of the Miller, Moss & Hartman affair, and that if so he would put up at the Seven Stars and call for his son at the Chateau d'Orage. It seemed odd that the son should have given the address of the very place where he was living the riotous life his father so strongly condemned. The only other object in the pockets besides the common necessaries was an old locket enclosing the faded portrait of a dark lady.

Forain stood frowning a moment, the paper twisted in his fingers; then he said abruptly: "May I go up to your house, Monsieur le Baron?"

The baron bowed silently; they left the dead man's seconds to mount guard over his body, and the rest mounted slowly up the slope. They went the slower for two reasons—first, because the steep and straggling path was made more irregular by straggling roots of pine like the tails of dying dragons, and slippery with green slime that might have been their own green and unnatural gore; and second, because Forain stopped every now and then to take what seemed needless note of certain details of the general decay. Either the baron had not long been in possession of the place, or he cared very little for appearances.

What had once been a garden was eaten by giant weeds, and when they passed the cucumber frames on the slope Forain saw they were empty and the glass of one of them had a careless crack, like a star in the ice. Forain stood staring at the hole for nearly a minute.

Entering the house by the long French windows, they came first on a round outer room with a round card-table. It might by the shape have been a turret-room, but seemed somehow as light and sunny as a summer-house, being white and gold in the ornate eighteenth-century style. But it was as faded as it was florid, and the white had grown yellow and the gold brown. At the moment this decay was but the background of the silent yet speaking drama of a more recent disorder. Cards were scattered across the floor and table, as if flung or struck flying from a hand that held them; champagne bottles stood or lay at random everywhere, half of them broken, nearly all of them empty; a chair was overturned. It was easy to believe all that Lorraine had said of the orgy that now seemed to him a nightmare.

"Not an edifying scene," said the baron, with a sigh, "and yet I suppose it has a moral."

"It may appear singular," replied Forain, "but in my own moral problem it is even reassuring. Given the death, I am even glad of the drink."

As he spoke he stooped swiftly and picked up a handful of cards from the carpet.

"The five of spades," he said to Monk musingly in English, "the five of swords, as the old Spaniards would say, I suppose. You know 'spade' is 'espada,' a sword? The four of swords—spades, I mean. The three of spades. The—Have you got a telephone here?"

"Yes—in another room, round by the other door of the house," answered the baron, rather taken aback.

"I'll use it, if I may," said Forain, and stepped swiftly out of the card-room. He strode across a larger and darker *salon* within, which for some reason had remained in a sterner and more antiquated style of decoration. There were antlers above him; a glimmer of armour showed on the gloom of oak and tapestry, and he saw one thing that arrested his eye as he strode towards the farther door. A trophy of two swords crossed was on one side of the fireplace, and on the corresponding place opposite the empty hooks of another. He understood why the two rapiers had seemed to be antiquated. Under the ominous empty hooks stood an ebony cabinet carved with cherubs as grotesque as goblins.

Forain felt as if the black cherubim were peering at him with a curiosity quite unangelic. He gazed a moment at the drawers of the cabinet, and passed on.

He shut the door behind him, and they heard another door close in a more distant part of the building, away towards the road that ran on the remoter side of the house. There was a silence; they could hear neither the bell nor the talk at the telephone.

Baron Bruno had dropped the glass from his eye, and was plucking a little nervously at his long dark beard.

"I suppose, sir," he said, addressing Monk, "we can count on your friend's feeling of honour?"

"I am certain of his honour," said the Englishman, with the faintest accent on the possessive pronoun.

The surviving duellist, Le Caron, spoke for the first time, and roughly.

"Let the man telephone," he said. "No French jury would call this miserable thing murder. It was almost an accident."

"One to be avoided, I think," said Monk coldly.

Forain had reappeared, and his brow was cleared of its wrinkle of reflection. "Baron," he said, "I have resolved my little problem. I will treat this tragedy as a private misfortune on one condition—that you all meet me and give me an account that satisfies me within this week, and in Paris. Say outside the Café Roncesvaux on Thursday night. Does that suit you? Is that understood? Very well, let us return to the garden."

When they went out again through the French windows the sun was already high in heaven, and every detail of the slope and lawn below glittered with a new clarity. As they turned the corner of a clump of trees and came out above the duelling-ground, Forain stopped dead and put on the Baron's arm a hand that caught like a hook.

"My God!" he said. "This will never do. You must get away at once."

"What?" cried the other.

"It's been quick work," said the investigator. "The father's here already."

They followed his glance down to the garden by the wall, and the first thing they saw was that the rusty old garden door was standing open, letting in the white light of the road. Then they realised that a few yards within it was a tall, lean, grey-bearded man, clad completely in black and looking like some Puritanic minister. He was standing on the turf and looking down at the dead. A girl in grey, with a black hat, was kneeling by the body, and the two seconds, as by an instinct of decency, had withdrawn to some distance and stood gazing gloomily at the ground. In the clear sunlight the whole group looked like a lighted scene on a green stage.

"Go back at once—all three of you," said Forain almost fiercely. "Get away by the other door. You must not meet *him*, at least."

The Baron, after an instant's hesitation, seemed to assent, and Le Caron had already turned away. The slayer and his two seconds moved towards the house and vanished into it once more, the tall young man with the shaven head going last with a leisure that made even his long legs look cynical. He was the only one of them who scarcely seemed affected at all.

"Mr. Crane, I think," said Forain to the bereaved father. "I fear you know all that we can tell you."

The grey-bearded man nodded; there was a certain frost-bitten fierceness about his face and something wild in the eye contrasting with the control in the features, something that seemed natural enough at such a time, but which they found afterwards to be more normal to him even in ordinary times.

"Sir," he said, "I have seen the end of cards and wine and the Lord's judgments for everything I feared." Then he added, with an incongruous simplicity somehow rather tragic than comic: "And fencing, sir. I was always against all that French fad of getting prizes for fencing. Football is bad enough, with betting and every sort of brutality, but it doesn't lead to this. You are English, I think?" he said abruptly to Monk. "Have you anything to say of this abominable murder?"

"I say it is an abominable murder," said Monk firmly. "I was saying so to my friend hardly half an hour ago."

"Ah, and you?" cried the old man, looking suspiciously at Forain. "Were you defending duels, perhaps?"

"Sir," replied Forain gently, "it is no time for defending anything. If your son had fallen from a horse, I would not defend horses; you should say your worst of them. If he had been drowned in a boat, I would join you in wishing every boat at the bottom of the sea."

The girl was looking at Forain with an innocent intensity of gaze which was curious and painful, but the father turned impatiently away, saying to Monk: "As you are English at least, I should like to consult you." And he drew the Englishman aside.

But the daughter still looked across at Forain without speech or motion, and he looked back at her with a rather indescribable interest. She was fair, like her brother, with yellow hair and a white face, but her features were irregular with that fairy luck that falls right once in fifty times, and then is more beautiful than beauty. Her eyes seemed as colourless as water, and yet as bright as diamonds, and when he met them the Frenchman realised, with a mounting and unmanageable emotion, that he was facing something far more

positive than the laxity of the son or the limitations of the father.

"May I ask you, sir," she said steadily, "who were those three men with you just now? Were they the men who murdered him?"

"Mademoiselle," he said, feeling somehow that all disguises had dropped, "you use a harsh word, and heaven knows it is natural. But I must not stand before you on false pretences. I myself have held such a weapon and nearly done such a murder."

"I don't think you look like a murderer," she said calmly. "But they did. That man with the red beard, he was like a wolf—a well-dressed wolf, which is the worst part of it. And that big, pompous man—what could he be but horrible, with his big black beard and a glass in one eye?"

"Surely," said Forain respectfully, "it is not wicked to be well dressed, and a man might be more sinned against than sinning and still have a beard and an eyeglass."

"Not all that big beard and that one little eyeglass," she replied positively. "Oh, I only saw them in the distance, but I know quite well I'm right."

"I know you must think any duellist is a criminal and ought to be punished," said Forain rather huskily. "Only, having been one myself——"

"I don't," she said. "I think those duellists ought to be punished. And, just to prove what I mean and don't mean"—and her pale face was changed with a puzzling and yet dazzling smile—"I want you to punish them."

There was a strange silence, and she added quietly:

"You have seen something yourself. You have some guess, I am sure, about how they came to fight, and what was really behind it all. You know there is really something wrong, much more wrong than the quarrel about cards."

He bowed to her, and seemed to yield like a man rebuked by an old friend.

"Mademoiselle," he said, "I am honoured by your confidence. And your commission."

He straightened himself equally abruptly, and turned to face the father, who had drawn near again in conversation with Monk.

"Mr. Crane," he said gravely, "I must ask you for the moment to trust me. This gentleman, as well as other countrymen of yours to whom I can refer you, will, I think, tell you that I can be trusted. I have already communicated with the authorities, and you may even regard me in a sense as their representative. I can answer for the fact that those responsible in this dreadful affair are under observation, and that justice can effect whatever may be found to be just. If you will honour me with an appointment in Paris after Tuesday next, I can tell you more of many things that you ought to know. Meanwhile, I will make any arrangements you desire touching the —formalities of respect for the dead."

The eye of old Crane was still choleric, but he bowed, and Forain and Monk, returning the salutation, retraced their way up the path to the chateau. As they did so the Frenchman paused again by the cucumber frame and pointed to the broken glass.

"That's the biggest hole in the story so far," he said; "it gapes at me like the mouth of hell."

"That!" exclaimed his friend. "That might have happened any time."

"It happened this morning," said Forain, "or else—anyhow, the broken bits are fresh; nothing has grown round them. And there is the mark of a heel on the soil inside. One of these men stepped straight on to the glass going down to the duelling ground. Why?"

"Oh, well," observed Monk, that fellow Lorraine said he was blind drunk last night."

"But not this morning," replied Forain. "And though a man blind drunk, even in broad daylight, might conceivably put his foot into a big glass frame right in front of him, I doubt if he could take it out again so neatly. If he were as drunk as that, I think the man-trap would trip and throw him, and there would be more broken glass. This does not look to me like a man who was blind drunk. It is more like a man who was blind."

"Blind!" repeated Monk, with a quite irrational creeping of the flesh. "But none of these men are blind. Is there any other explanation?"

"Yes," replied Forain. "They did it in the dark. And that is the darkest part of the business."

¶

ANYONE who had tracked the course of the two friends on the ensuing Thursday evening, when dusk had already kindled around them the many-coloured lights of

Paris, might have imagined that they had no purpose but the visiting of a variety of cafés. Yet their course, though crooked and erratic, was designed according to the consistent strategy of the amateur detective. Forain went first to see the countess, the still surviving widow of the nobleman who fell fifteen years before, in a duel on the same spot. He went in a literal sense to see her, and not to call on her. For he contented himself with sitting outside the café opposite her house and playing with an apéritif until she came out to her carriage—a dark-browed lady, with a beauty rather fixed like a picture than still living like a flower: a portrait from a mummy-case. Then he merely glanced at the portrait in the old locket he had taken from the dead man's pocket, nodded almost approvingly, and made his way across the river to a less aristocratic and more purely commercial part of the town.

Passing rapidly along a solid street of banks and public buildings, he reached a large hotel built on the same ponderous pattern, but having the usual litter of little tables on the pavement outside. They were intercepted with ornamental shrubs and covered with an awning striped with white and purple, and at a table at the extreme corner, against the last green afterglow of evening, he saw the black bulk of Baron Bruno sitting between his two friends. The awning that shaded them just cut off the upper part of his tall black hat, and Monk had the fancy that he resembled some black Babylonian caryatid supporting the whole building; perhaps there was something Assyrian about his large square beard. The Englishman felt a subconscious temptation to share his countrywoman's prejudice, but it was evident that Forain did not share it. For he sat down with the three men, and began to exhibit a very unexpected camaraderie. He ordered wine and pressed it upon them, passing afterwards into animated conversation, and it was not until about half an hour afterwards that our imaginary spectator, hovering on his trail, would have seen him start up with a slight return to stiffness, salute the company and resume his singular journey.

His zigzag course through the lighted city carried him first to a public telephone and then to a public office, which Monk was able to identify as the place where the dead body was awaiting medical examination. From this place he came out looking very grim, like one who has faced an ugly fact, but he said nothing and pursued his course to the police headquarters, where he was closeted for some time with the authorities. Then he crossed the river once more, walking swiftly and still in silence, and in a quiet corner of Paris struck the worn white gateway of a building that had once been an hotel in the ancient and aristocratic sense, and was now an hotel in a more commercial, but particularly quiet fashion. Passing through the porch and passages, he came out on a garden so secluded that the very sunset sky seemed a private awning of gold and green like the awning of purple and silver under which the sombre baron had sat. A few guests in evening dress were scattered at tables under the trees, but Forain went swiftly past them to one table near a flight of garden steps, at which he could see a girl in grey with golden hair. It was Margaret Crane; she looked up as he approached, but she only said, as if breathlessly: "Do you know any more about the murder?"

Before he could reply her father had appeared at the top of the steps, and Forain felt vaguely that while the girl's grey dress seemed to harmonise with everything, the rigid and rusty black of the old man's clothes remained like the protest of a Puritan in a garden of Cavaliers.

"The murder," he repeated in a loud and harsh voice, heard everywhere: "that's what we want to know about. This murder, sir!"

"Mr. Crane," said Forain, "I hope you know how I feel your position, but it is only fair to warn you that in these criminal matters one must speak carefully. If it comes to a trial, your case will be none the better if you have abused these men at random, even in private. And I am bound to say, not only that the duel as a duel seems to have been regular, but that the duellists seem to be men of marked regularity."

"What do you mean?" demanded the old man.

"I will be frank with you and own I have seen them since," said Forain. "Nay, I have passed a sort of festive evening with them—or what I meant to be a festive evening. But I am forced to say they are as little festive as your own conscience could desire. Indeed, they seem to have business habits very much like your own. Frankly, I tried to make them drink and to draw them into a game of cards, but the baron and his

friends coldly declined, said they had appointments, and we parted after black coffee and a brief and rather curious conversation."

"I hate them the more for that," said the girl.

"You are quick, Mademoiselle," observed Forain, with a growing admiration. "I also took the matter in that spirit, if only for experiment. I said bluntly to our baronial friend: 'So long as I thought you were a drinking and a dicing company, I took this for a drunken accident. But let me tell you it does not look well when elderly men, themselves sober, themselves indifferent to play, get a mere boy among them and play cards with him. You know what is thought of that; it is thought that the old man takes a hand—well, rather too like an old hand. And it is worse when he silences his opponent by fencing like an old hand also.'"

"And what did they say to that?" asked the girl.

"It is painful to me to repeat it," said Forain, "but it was quite as uncomfortable a surprise to me. Just as I seemed to have cornered them finally, that red-bearded man, Le Caron, whose sword made the mortal thrust, himself broke in like one abandoning disguise, with impatience and passion. 'I respect the dead,' he said, 'but you force me from my reticence. I can only tell you it was not we, the elder men, who dragged the boy into drink; it was he who dragged us. He arrived at the chateau half drunk already, and insisted on the baron ordering champagne from the Seven Stars down the road, for we were a temperate party and the cellar was not even stocked. It was he who insisted on play; it was he who taunted us with being afraid to play; it was he who at last added, quite wantonly and in wild falsehood, the intolerable taunt that we cheated at play.'"

"I will not believe it," said Crane, but his daughter remained silent, with her pale and penetrating face turned towards the amateur detective, who continued his report of the conversation.

"'Oh, I don't ask you to take my word,' Le Caron went on. 'Ask Lorraine himself, ask Dr. Vandam himself, who was sent to the inn for the wine, so that he was away when the row occurred. He stopped behind there to settle, and wasn't sorry, I think, to be out of it. He also, like myself, is glad to be *bourgeois* in these matters. Ask the innkeeper himself; he will tell you the wine was bought well on in the evening, after the young man arrived. Ask the people at the railway station; they will tell you when the young man arrived. You can easily test my story.'"

"I can see by your face," said the girl in a low voice, "that you have tested it. And you have found it true."

"You see the heart of things," said Forain.

"I cannot see the hearts of these men," she answered. "But I can see the hollows where their hearts should be."

"You still find them horrible," he said. "Who can blame you?"

"Horrible!" cried the old man. "Didn't they murder my son?"

"I speak only as an adviser," observed the Frenchman. "I know you cannot believe a duellist could be a respectable man. I only say that, as a fact, these seem to be respectable men. I have not only verified their tale, but traced back something of their past. They seem to have been concerned with commercial things, but solidly and on a considerable scale; I am in touch with the police dossiers, and should know of any other such scandals about them. Forgive me; I fear I do think that a duel is sometimes justifiable. I will not horrify you by saying that this one was justifiable; I only warn you that, in French opinion, they may be able to justify it."

"Yes," said the girl. "They grow more horrible as you speak of them. Oh! that is the really horrible man—the man who can always be justified. Honest men leave more holes gaping, like my poor brother, but the wicked are always in armour. Is there anything so blasphemous as the bad man's case when his case is complete, as the lawyers say; when the judge gravely sums up, and the jury agree and the police obey, and everything goes on oiled wheels? Is there anything so oily as the smell of that oil? It is then I feel I cannot wait for the Day of Judgment to crack their whited sepulchres."

"And it is then," said Forain quietly, "that I fight a duel."

The girl started a little. "Then?" she repeated.

"Then," repeated the Franchman, lifting his head. "You, Mademoiselle, have uttered the defence of the good duellist. You have proved the right of the private gentleman to draw a private sword. Yes,

it is then that I do this criminal and bloody thing that so much horrifies you and your father. Yes, it is then that I become a murderer. When there is no crack in the whitewash and I cannot wait for the wrath of God. And permit me the reminder that you have not yet heard the end of my interview with the men who have left you in mourning."

Crane still stared in frosty suspicion, but the girl, as Forain suggested, had great intuitions. Her face and eyes kindled as she gazed.

"You don't mean——" she began, and then stopped.

Forain rose to his feet. "Yes," he said. "Being such a bloodthirsty character, I must no longer remain in company so respectable. Yes, Mademoiselle, I have challenged the man who killed your brother."

"Challenged!" repeated the bristling Crane. "Challenged—more of this—of this butchery!" and he choked. But the girl had risen also and stretched out her hand like a queen.

"No, father," she said. "This gentleman is our friend, and he caught me out fairly. But I see now that there is more in French wit than we have understood; yes, and more in French duelling."

With a heightened colour and a lowered voice, Forain answered: "Mademoiselle, my inspiration is English." And, with a rather abrupt bow, he strode away, accompanied by Harry Monk, who regarded him with a contained amusement.

"I cannot affect to hope," said Monk airily, "that I myself constitute the English inspiration of your life."

"Nonsense," said the other rather testily, "let us get back to business. As I imagined your views on duelling were so similar to old Crane's that you could not consistently represent me, I've asked his unfortunate son's seconds to act as mine. I believe that young Lorraine will be of great use in helping us to probe this mystery. I have talked to him, and I am convinced of his great ability."

"And you have talked to me for years," said Monk, laughing, "and you are convinced of my great stupidity."

"Of your great sincerity," said Forain. "That is why I do not ask you to help me here."

Monk's scruples, however, did not prevent his being present at the new encounter that had been so rapidly and even irregularly arranged. And his travels with his eccentric friend, which had already begun to remind him of the overturns and recurrences of a nightmare, brought him a few days later back to the old duelling ground of the Chateau d'Orage. The garden of Baron Bruno had apparently been selected for a second time as a sort of concession to the baron's party, but it was a rather grim privilege, and they evidently felt it as such. So little disposed were they, indeed, to linger about the place where they had once feasted and fought, that the baron's motor was waiting in the road without to take them back immediately to Paris. Forain had always vaguely felt that the baron was very tenuously attached to his house and property, and in this case his party seemed to revisit it like ghosts. The prejudice of Margaret Crane would have said that a shadow of doom was visibly closing in on them. But it was more reasonable and consonant with the more quiet and *bourgeois* character to which they seemed entitled to suppose that they were naturally distressed at returning to the scene of their one reluctant deed of blood.

Whatever the reason, the baron's brown face was heavy and sombre, and Le Caron, when he again found himself standing sword in hand on that fatal grass, was so white that his beard looked scarlet, like false hair or fiery paint. Monk almost fancied that the bright point of the poised rapier was faintly vibrant, as in a hand that shook.

The pine-shadowed park, with its careless and almost colourless decay, seemed a place where centuries might pass unnoticed. The white morning light served only to accentuate the grey details, and Monk caught himself fancying that it was truly the ashen vegetation of primeval æons. This may have been an effect of his nerves, which were not unnaturally strained. After all, this was the third duel in those grounds, and two had ended in death; he could not but wonder if his friend was to be the last victim. Anyhow, it seemed to him that the preliminaries were intolerably lengthy. Le Caron had long and low-voiced consultations with the lowering baron; and even Forain's own seconds, Lorraine and the doctor, seemed more inclined to wait and whisper than to come to the mortal business. And all this was the more strange because the fight, when it did come at last, seemed to be over in a flash, like a conjuring trick.

The swords had barely touched twice or thrice when Le Caron found himself swordless. His weapon had twitched itself like a live thing out of his hand, and went spinning and sparkling over the garden wall; they could hear the steel tinkle on the stones of the road. Forain had disarmed him with a turn of the wrist.

Forain straightened himself and made a salute with his sword.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I am quite satisfied, if you are. After all, it was a slight cause of quarrel, and the honour of both parties is, so far, secure. Also, I understand, you gentlemen are anxious to get back to town."

Monk had long felt that his friend was more and more disposed to let the opposite group off lightly; he had long been speaking of them soberly as sober merchants. But whether or no it was the anti-climax of safety, he had a sense that the figures opposite had shrunk, and were more commonplace and ugly. The eagle nose of Le Caron looked more like a common hook; his fine clothes seemed to sit more uneasily on him, as on a hastily dressed doll; and even the solid and solemn baron somehow looked more like a large dummy outside a tailor's shop. But the strangest thing of all was that the baron's other colleague, Valence, of the shaven head, was standing astraddle in the background, wearing a broad though a bitter grin. As the baron and the defeated duellist made their way rather sullenly through the garden door to the car beyond, Forain went up to this last member of the strange group, and (much to Monk's surprise) talked quickly and quietly for several minutes. It was only when Bruno's great voice was heard calling his name from without that this last figure also turned and left the garden.

"*Exeunt* brigands!" said Forain, with a cheerful change in his voice, "and now the four detectives will go up and examine the brigands' den."

And he turned and began once again to mount the slope to the chateau, the rest following in single file. Monk, who was just behind him, remarked abruptly when they were halfway up the ascent:

"So you didn't kill him, after all?"

"I didn't want to kill him," replied his French friend.

"What did you want?"

"I wanted to see whether he could fence," said Forain. "He can't."

Monk eyed in a puzzled manner the tall, straight, grey-clad back of the figure mounting ahead of him, but was silent till Forain spoke again.

"You remember," continued that gentleman, "that old Crane said his unfortunate son had actually got prizes for fencing. But that carroty-whiskered Mr. Le Caron hardly knows how to hold a foil. Of course, it's very natural; after all, he is but a quiet business man, as I told you, and deals more in gold than steel."

"But, my good man," cried Monk, addressing the back in exasperation, "what the devil does it all mean? Why was Crane killed in the duel?"

"There never was any duel," said Forain, without turning round.

Dr. Vandam behind uttered an abrupt sound as of astonishment, or perhaps enlightenment; but, though it was followed by many questions, Forain said no more till they stood in the long inner room of the chateau, with the weapons on the wall and the ebony cabinet, on which the black cherubs looked blacker than ever. Forain felt more darkly a certain contradiction between their colour and shape, that was like a blasphemy. Black cherubs were like the Black Mass—they were symbols of some idea that hell is an inverted copy of heaven, like a landscape hanging downwards in a lake.

He shook off his momentary dreams and stooped over the drawers of the cabinet, and when he spoke again it was lightly enough.

"You know the chateau, Monsieur Lorraine," he said, "and I expect you know the cabinet, and even the drawer. I see it's been opened lately." The drawer, indeed, was not completely closed and, giving it a sudden jerk, he pulled it completely out of the cabinet. Without further words he bore it, with its contents, back into the card-room and put it on the round table; and at his invitation his three colleagues or co-detectives drew up their chairs and sat round it. The drawer seemed to contain the contents of an old curiosity shop, such as Balzac loved to describe—a tumbled heap of brown coins, dim jewels and trinkets, of which tales, true and false, are told.

"Well, what about it?" asked Monk. "Do you want to get something out of it?"

"Not exactly," replied the investigator. "I rather fancy I want to put something into it."

He pulled from his pocket the locket with the dark portrait, and poised it thoughtfully in his hand.

"We have now to ask ourselves," went the detective to his colleagues, "why young Crane was carrying this, which is a portrait of the countess?"

"He went about Paris a good deal," said Dr. Vandam rather grimly.

"If she knew him well," proceeded Forain, "it seems strange she has taken no notice of his sad end."

"Perhaps she knew him a little too well," cried Lorraine, with a light laugh. "Or, perhaps, though it's an ugly thing to say, she was glad to be rid of him. There were uglier stories when her husband, the old count——"

"You know the château, Monsieur Lorraine?" repeated Forain, looking at him steadily and even sternly. "I think that's where the locket came from." And he tossed it on to the many-coloured heap in the drawer.

Lorraine's eyes were literally like black diamonds as he gazed fascinated at the heap; he seemed really too excited to reply. Forain continued his exposition.

"Poor Crane, I fancy, must have found it here. Or else somebody—found it here and gave it to him. Or else somebody—By the way, surely that's a real Renascence chain there—Italian and fifteenth century, unless I'm wrong. There are valuable things here, Monsieur Lorraine, and I believe you're a judge of them."

"I know a little about the Renascence," answered Lorraine, and the pale Dr. Vandam flashed a queer look at him through his spectacles.

"There was a ring, too, I suspect," said Forain. "I have put back the locket. Would you, Monsieur Lorraine, kindly put back the ring?"

Lorraine rose, the smile still on his lips; he put two fingers in his waistcoat pocket and drew out a small circlet of wrought gold with a green stone.

The next moment Forain's arm shot across the table trying to catch his wrist; but his motion, though swift as his sword thrust, was yet too late. Young Mr. Waldo Lorraine stood with the smile on his lips and the Renascence ring on his finger while one could count five. Then his feet slipped on the smooth floor and he fell dead across the table, with his black ringlets among the rich refuse of the drawer. Almost simultaneously with the shock of his fall, Dr. Vandam had taken one bound, burst out of the French windows and disappeared down the garden like a cat.

"Don't move," said Forain with a steely steadiness. "The police are on the watch. I laid them on the other day in Paris when I saw poor Crane's body."

"But surely," cried his bewildered friend, "it was not only then that you saw the wound on his body."

"I mean the wound on his finger," said Forain.

He stood a minute or two in silence, looking down at the fallen figure across the table with pity and something almost like admiration.

"Strange," he said at last, "that he should die just here, with his head in all that dustbin of curiosities that he was born among and had such a taste for. You saw he was a Jew, of course, but, my God, what a genius! Like your young Disraeli—and he might have succeeded too and filled the world with his fame. Just a mistake or two, breaking a cucumber frame in the dark, and he lies dead in all that dead bric-a-brac, as if in the pawnshop where he was born."

¶

THE next appointment Forain made with his friends was at the office of the Sûreté, in a private room. Monk was a little late for the appointment; the party was already assembled round a table, and it gave him a final shock. He was not, indeed, surprised to see Crane and his daughter sitting opposite Forain, and he guessed that the man presiding, with the white beard and the red rosette, was the chief of police himself. But his head turned when he found the fifth place filled with the broad shoulders, cropped hair and ghastly, handsome face of Valence, the younger second of Le Caron.

Old Crane was in the middle of a speech when he entered, and was speaking with his usual smouldering and somewhat self-righteous indignation.

"I send my son to execute a deed of partnership in a good business with Miller, Moss & Hartman, one of the first firms in the civilised world, sir, with branches in America and all the colonies, as big as the Bank of England. What happens? No sooner does he set foot in your country than he gets into a dicing, drinking, duelling gang, and is butchered in a barbarous brawl with drawn swords."

"Mr. Crane," said Forain gently, "you will forgive me if I both contradict you and congratulate you. Given so sad a story, I give you the gladdest news a father could hear. You have wronged your son. He did not drink, he did not dice, he did not duel. He obeyed you in every particular. He devoted himself wholly to Messrs. Miller, Moss & Hartman; he died in your service, and he died rather than fail you."

The girl leaned swiftly forward, and she was pale but radiant.

"What do you mean?" she cried. "Then who were these men with swords and hateful faces? What were they doing? Who are they?"

"I will tell you," answered the Frenchman calmly. "They are Messrs. Miller, Moss & Hartman, one of the first firms in the civilised world, as big as the Bank of England."

There was a silence of stupefaction on the other side of the table, and it was Forain who went on, but with a change and challenge in his voice.

"Oh, how little you rich masters of the modern world know about the modern world! What do you know about Miller, Moss & Hartman, *except* that they have branches all over the world and are as big as the Bank of England? You know they go to the ends of the earth, but where do they come from? Is there any check on businesses changing hands or men changing names? Miller may be twenty years dead, if he was ever alive. Miller may stand for Muller, or for Moses. The back-doors of every business to-day are open to such newcomers, and do you ever ask from what gutters they come? And then you think your son lost if he goes into a music-hall, and you want to shut up all the taverns to keep him from bad company. Believe me, you had better shut up the banks."

Margaret Crane was still staring with electric eyes. "But what in the name of mercy happened?" she cried.

The investigator turned slightly in his chair and made a movement, as of somewhat sombre introduction, towards Valence, who sat looking at the table with a face like coloured stone.

"We have with us," said Forain, "one who knows from within the whole of this strange story. We need not trouble much about his own story. Of the five men who have played this horrible farce, he is certainly the most honest, and therefore the only one who has been in prison. It was for a crime of passion long ago, which turned him from being at worst a Lothario to being at worst an Apache. Hence these more respectable ruffians had a rope round his neck, and to-day he is not so much a traitor as a runaway. If on that hideous night he held a candle to the devil, he is no devil-worshipper; at least he has little worship for these devils."

There was a long silence, and the stony lips of the shaven Apollo curled and moved at last. "Well," he said, "I won't trouble you with much about these men I had to serve. Their real names were not Lorraine, Le Caron, etc., any more than they were Miller, Moss, etc., though they went by the first in society and the second in business. Just now we need not trouble about their real names; I'm sure they never did. They were cosmopolitan moneylenders mostly; I was in their power, and they kept me as a big bully and bodyguard to save them from what they richly deserved at the hands of many ruined men. They would no more have thought of fighting a duel than of going on a crusade. I knew something of the countess, who has nothing to do with the story, except that I got them a short lease of her house. One evening Lorraine, who was the leader and the cleverest rascal in Europe, young as he was, happened to be turning over the drawer of curios, which he had taken out of the black cabinet and put on the round card-table. He found the old Italian ring, and told us it was poisoned; he knew a lot about such toys. Suddenly he made a momentary gesture covering the drawer, like a fence when he hears the police. He recovered his calm; there was no danger, but the gesture told of old times. What had produced it was a man who had appeared silently, and was standing outside the French windows, having entered up the garden slope.

"He was a slim, fair young man, carefully dressed and wearing a silk hat, which he took off as he entered. My name is Crane,' he said a little stiffly and nervously, and plucked off his glove to offer his hand, which Lorraine shook with great warmth. The others joined in the greeting, and it gradually became apparent that this was the representative of some firm with whom they were to make an important amalgamation. In the entrance-room all was welcome and gaiety, but when young Crane had followed old Bruno into the big inner room, leaving

his hat and gloves on the card-table by the curios, I fancy things did not go so smoothly. I did not understand the business fully, but I was watching the three others who did, and I came to the conclusion that Bruno, in their name, was making some proposition to the new junior partner which they regarded as a very handsome proposition for him, but which he did not regard as altogether handsome in other respects. They seemed quite confident at first, but as the talk went on in the inner room, Vandam and Le Caron exchanged gloomy glances; and suddenly an indignant voice came from within: 'Do you mean, sir, that my father is to suffer?' and then, after an inaudible reply, 'Confidential, sir! The confidence I imagine, is placed by my father in me. I shall instantly report this astounding proposal. . . . No, sir, I am not to be bribed.'

"I was watching Lorraine's face, that seemed to have grown old as a yellow parchment, and his eyes glittered like the old stones on the table. He was leaning across it, his mouth close to the ear of Vandam, and he was saying: 'He must not leave the house. Our work all over the world is lost if he leaves this house.' 'But we can't stop him,' whispered the doctor, and his teeth chattered. 'Can't!' repeated Lorraine, with a ghastly smile, yet somehow like a man in a trance: 'Oh, one *can* do anything. I never did it before, though.' He picked the poison ring out of the heap. Then he swiftly drew the young man's glove out of his hat on the table. There came a burst of speech from the inner room: 'I shall tell him you are a pack of thieves!' and Lorraine quietly slipped the ring inside a finger of the glove, a moment before its owner swung into the room. He clapped on his hat, furiously pulled on his gloves, and strode to the French windows. Then he flung them open wide upon the sunset, stepped out and fell dead on the garden turf beyond. I remember his tall hat rolling down the slope, and how horrible it seemed that it should still be moving among the bushes when he lay so still."

"He died like a soldier for a flag," said Forain.

"Perhaps you have already guessed," went on Valance, "the rest of the story. Hell itself must have inspired Lorraine that night, for the whole drama was his and worked out to the last detail. The difficulty in every murder is how to hide the corpse. He decided not to hide it, but to show it; I might say to advertise it. He had been striding up and down the inner hall, his flexible face working with thought, when his eye caught the crossed swords on the trophy. 'This man died in a duel,' he said. 'In England he'd have died out duck-shooting, and in Russia of dynamite. In France he died in a duel. If we all take the lighter blame, they will never look for heavier; it's a good rule with confessions,' and again he wore that awful smile. He not only staged the duel, but the drunken quarrel that was to explain it. They were quite right when they said the champagne was not sent for till after the boy's arrival. It was not sent for till after his death. They carefully scattered cards, carefully threw furniture about and so on. Then they put Le Caron—the showiest—in his shirt-sleeves, did the same with the dead man and then Lorraine deliberately passed the sword through the heart that had already ceased to beat. It seemed like a second murder, and a worse one. Then they carried him down in the dark, just before the dawn, so that no one could possibly see him save on the fighting ground. Lorraine thought of twenty little things; he took an old miniature of the countess from the cabinet and put it in the dead man's pocket, to put people off the scent—as it did. He left Mr. Crane's letter, because its warning against dissipation actually supported the story. It was all well fitted together, and if Le Caron hadn't put his foot on a cucumber frame in the dark I doubt if even Monsieur Forain would ever have found a hole in the business."

Margaret Crane walked firmly out of the offices of the Sûreté, but at the top of the steps outside she wavered and might almost have fallen. Forain caught her by the elbow, and they looked at each other for a space; then they went down the steps and down the street together. She had lost a brother in the black adventure, and what else she gained is no part of the tale of the five strange men, or, as she came to call it afterwards, the five of swords. Margaret asked one more question about it, and their talk afterwards was of deeply different matters. She only said: "Was it the wound you discovered on his finger that made you certain?"

"Partly his finger," he assented gravely, "and partly his face. There was something still fresh on his face that made me fancy already that he was no waster, but had died

more than worthily. It was something young and yet nobler than youth, and more beautiful than beauty. It was something I had seen somewhere else. In fact, it was the converse, so to speak, of the case in Rostand's play, '*Monsieur de Bergerac, je suis ta cousine.*'"

"I don't understand you," she said.

"It was a family likeness," replied her companion.

A Coronation

ON the morning of the 31st of May, the families of the London citizens were stirring early in all houses. From Temple Bar to the Tower, the streets were fresh strewed with gravel, the footpaths were railed off along the whole distance, and occupied on one side by the guilds, their workmen, and apprentices, on the other by the city constables and officials in their gaudy uniforms, "with their staves in hand for to cause the people to keep good room and order." Cornhill and Gracechurch Street had dressed their fronts in scarlet and crimson, in arras and tapestry, and the rich carpet-work from Persia and the East. Cheapside, to outshine her rivals, was draped even more splendidly in cloth of gold, and tissue, and velvet. The sheriffs were pacing up and down on their great Flemish horses, hung with liveries, and all the windows were thronged with ladies crowding to see the procession pass. At length the Tower guns opened, the grim gates rolled back, and under the archway in the bright May sunshine, the long column began slowly to defile. Two states only permitted their representatives to grace the scene with their presence—Venice and France. It was, perhaps, to make the most of this isolated countenance, that the French ambassador's train formed the van of the cavalcade. Twelve French knights came riding foremost in surcoats of blue velvet with sleeves of yellow silk, their horses trapped in blue, with white crosses powdered on their hangings. After them followed a troop of English gentlemen, two and two, and then the Knights of the Bath, "in gown of violet, with hoods purfled with miniver like doctors." Next, perhaps at a little interval, the abbots passed on, mitred, in their robes; the barons followed in crimson velvet, the bishops then, and then the earls and marquises, the dresses of each order increasing in elaborate gorgeousness.

J. A. FROUDE.

Love

"LOVE a crime! No, Shirley: love is a divine virtue—obtrusiveness is a crime; forwardness is a crime; and both disgust: but love! no purest angel need blush to love. And when I see or hear either man or woman couple shame with love, I know their minds are coarse, their associations debased. . . ."

"You sacrifice three-fourths of the world, Caroline."

"They are cold—they are cowardly—they are stupid, on the subject, Shirley! They never loved—they never were loved!"

"Thou art right, Lina! And in their dense ignorance they blaspheme living fire, seraphs—brought from a divine altar."

"They confound it with sparks mounting from Tophet!"

From "Shirley"—CHARLOTTE BRONTË.

In London Town

The First Visit

OUR young friend was so entirely overcome by his feelings and the genius of the place, that he was quite unable to make an observation. Each minute the streets seemed to grow more spacious and more brilliant, and the multitude more dense and more excited. Beautiful buildings, too, rose before him; palaces and churches, and streets, and squares of imposing architecture; to his inexperienced eye and unsophisticated spirit their route appeared a never-ending triumph. To the hackney-coachman, however, who had no imagination, and who was quite satiated with metropolitan experience, it only appeared that he had had an exceedingly good fare, and that he was jogging up from Bishopsgate Street to Charing Cross . . .

. . . "Is this Charing Cross, sir? I wonder if we shall ever be able to get over.—Is this the fullest part of the town, sir?—What a fine day, sir! How lucky we are in the weather!—We are lucky in everything!—Whose house is that?—Northumberland House!—Is it the Duke of Northumberland's—Does he live there?—How I should like to see it! Is it very fine?—Who is that?—What is this?—The Admiralty! Oh, let me see the Admiralty!—The Horse Guards!—Oh! where, where?—Let us set our watches by the Horse Guards. The guard of our coach always sets his watch by the Horse Guards . . . which is the best clock, the Horse Guards or St. Paul's—Is that the Treasury? Can we go in?—That is Downing Street, is it?—I never heard of Downing Street.—What do they do in Downing Street?—Is this Charing Cross still, or is it Parliament Street?—Where does Charing Cross end, and where does Parliament Street begin? By Jove, I see Westminster Abbey!"

BENJAMIN DISRAELI.

WILL you go along with me to Shepherd Market?
It's there they hold the merriest Fair in May.
Will you go along with me to Shepherd Market
In a pair of red-heeled slippers very gay?
I'll pick a bunch of cowslips for your bodice
And I'll tie a yellow ribbon in your hair,
If you'll go along with me to Shepherd Market
And dance me round the Maypole at May-Fair.

ELEANOR FARJEON.

Reasons for Liking London

THINK what London would be, if the chief houses were in it, as in the cities of other countries, and not dispersed like great rarity-plums in a vast pudding of a country. Well, it is a tolerable place as it is! Were I a physician, I would prescribe nothing but recipe ccclxv drachm. Londin. Would you know why I like London so much? Why, if the world must consist of so many fools as it does, I choose to take them in the gross, and not made in separate pills, as they are prepared in the country. Besides, there is no being alone but in a metropolis; the worst place in the world to find solitude is the country; questions grow there, and that unpleasant Christian commodity, neighbours . . . I revive after being in London an hour, like a member of Parliament's wife.

I am persuaded that it is the dampness of this climate that gives me the gout; and London, from the number of fires and inhabitants, must be the driest spot in the nation.

HORACE WALPOLE.

Elizabethan London Shops

I HAVE heard within these forty years, when there were not of these haberdashers that sell French or Milan caps, glasses, knives, daggers, swords, girdles and such things, not a dozen in all London; now from the Tower to Westminster along, every street is full of them, and their shops glitter and shine of glasses, as well drinking as looking; yea all manner of vessel of the same stuff; painted cruses, gay daggers, knives, swords and girdles; that it is able to make any temperate man to gaze on them and to buy somewhat, though it serve to no purpose necessary.

A Tudor Record.

Two Hundred Years Later

Johnson: Let us take a walk from Charing-cross to White-chapel, through, I suppose, the greatest series of shops in the world. What is there in any of these shops (if you except gin-shops) that can do any human being any harm?

Goldsmith: Well, sir, I'll accept your challenge. The very next shop to Northumberland-house is a pickle shop.

Johnson: Well, sir; do we not know that a maid can, in one afternoon, make pickles sufficient to serve a whole family for a year? nay, that five pickle-shops can serve all the kingdom. Besides, sir, there is no harm done to anybody by the making of pickles, or the eating of pickles.

James Boswell.

LONDON, thou art of townes *A per se*.
Soveraign of cities, seemliest in sight,
Of high renoun, riches and royaltie;
Of lordis, barons, and many a goodly knyght;
Of most delectable lusty ladies bright;
Of famous, prelatis, in habits clericall;
Of merchauntis full of substaunce and of myght:
London, thou art the flour of Cities all.

William Dunbar.

Through a Poet's Eye

FORTY-FIVE miles westward from the North Sea, in the lap of a broad and pleasant valley watered by the Thames, stands the Great Metropolis. It comprises the City of London and its Liberties, with the City and Liberties of Westminster, the Burroughs of Southwark, and upwards of thirty of the contiguous villages of Middlesex and Surrey. East and west, its greatest length is about eight miles; north and south, its greatest breadth about five; its circumference, from twenty to thirty. The vast living tide of population goes thundering through its ten thousand streets in one unbroken roar.

The noise of the great thoroughfares is deafening. But you step aside into a by-lane, and anon you emerge into little green squares half filled with sunshine, half with shade, where no sound of living thing is heard, save the voice of a bird or a child, and amid solitude and silence you gaze in wonder at the great trees "growing in the heart of a brick-and-mortar wilderness."

Then there are the three parks, Hyde, Regent's and St. James's, where you may lose yourself in green alleys, and dream you are in the country; Westminster Abbey, with its tombs and solemn cloisters, where, with George Herbert, you may think that "when the bells do chime, 'tis angels' music; and high above all, half-hidden in smoke and vapour, rises the dome of St. Paul's."

H. W. Longfellow.

Staples Inn

IN Holborn I went through an arched entrance, over which was "Staples Inn." In a court opening inwards from this there was a surrounding seclusion of quiet dwelling-houses, with beautiful green shrubbery and grass-plots in the court, and a great many sunflowers in full bloom. . . . There was not a quieter spot in England than this, and it was very strange to have drifted into it so suddenly out of the bustle and rumble of Holborn and to lose all this repose as suddenly, on passing through the arch of the outer court. In all the hundreds of years since London was built, it has not been able to sweep its roaring tide over that little island of quiet.

Nathaniel Hawthorne.

The Wonderful Immensity

IF you wish to have a just notion of the magnitude of this city, you must not be satisfied with seeing its great streets and squares, but must survey the innumerable little lanes and courts. It is not in the showy evolutions of buildings, but in the multiplicity of human habitations which are crowded together, that the wonderful immensity of London consists . . . When a man is tired of London, he is tired of life; for there is in London all that life can afford.

Samuel Johnson.

EARTH has not anything to show more fair:
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty:
This city now doth like a garment wear
The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.
Never did sun more beautifully steep
In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill;
Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!
The river glideth at his own sweet will:
Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;
And all that mighty heart is lying still!

William Wordsworth.

The Exile's Return

THE sensations produced on an Englishman by returning to London after even a much shorter absence than that of Mr. Allen O'Donagough, are always powerful; and if no particular circumstances exist to injure the effect, exceedingly delightful. The stupendous world it encloses is sure to have spread farther and wider still than when he left it. New displays of wealth—new demonstrations of the power it brings—new proofs of the excess of civilisation, which, for lack of other work, turns the genius of man to the production of varieties in every article he uses, because improvements can go no further. All this he is sure to see at every step he takes; and then the aspect of all those he meets, at once so familiar to his memory, yet personally so utterly unknown. Of all this Mr. Allen O'Donagough was fully conscious, and the excitement it produced was exceedingly agreeable.

Mrs. Trollope.

Around Baker Street Before the War

EXCEPT where new and gigantic eruptions of palatial flats have broken out on it, this long, sober Marylebone Road wears, in the main, a discreet and slightly depressing air of early Victorian gentility; here and there the gentility is a little faded, but nowhere is it less respectable. Along Upper Baker Street (on our left) was a later residence of Mrs. Siddons; on the opposite side of the road, in York Place, Cardinal Wiseman lived for many years; the palatial building behind high railings, just past the Baker Street railway stations, is the new workhouse; and the almost equally palatial structure across the road houses Madame Tussaud's exhibition of wax-works.

Back across the road again, facing the York Gate entrance to Regent's Park, is Marylebone Church, where Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett solemnized their runaway marriage. On the same side, in that white, pigeon-breasted house at the corner of Devonshire Terrace, Dickens lived whilst he was writing " Barnaby Rudge," and " The Old Curiosity Shop," and as we go by the end of the turning you have a glimpse of the front door that opened to Lytton, Macready, Harrison Ainsworth, Sir Thomas Lawrence, when they called to visit him.

Arthur St. John Adcock.

A Londoner's Choice

I HAVE passed all my days in London, until I have formed as many and intense local attachments, as any of you mountaineers can have done with dead nature. The Lighted shops of the Strand and Fleet Street, the innumerable trades, tradesmen and customers, coaches, waggons, playhouses, all the bustle and wickedness round about Covent Garden, the very women of the Town, the Watchmen, drunken scenes, rattles—life awake, if you awake, at all hours of the night, the impossibility of being dull in Fleet Street, the crowds, the very dirt and mud, the Sun shining upon houses and pavements, the print shops, the old book stalls, parsons cheap'ning books, coffee houses, steams of soups kitchens, the pantomimes, London itself a pantomime and a masquerade—all these things work themselves into my mind and feed me, without a power of satiating me. The wonder of these sights impells me into night-walks about her crowded streets, and I often shed tears in the Strand from the fulness of joy at so much Life.

Charles Lamb.

Westminster Abbey

IN that temple of silence and reconciliation where the enmities of twenty generations lie buried, in the Great Abbey which has during many ages afforded a quiet resting-place to those whose minds and bodies have been shattered by the contentions of the Great Hall.

T. B. Macaulay.

So Dere and Swete

ALSO the citye of London, that is to me so dere and swete, in which I was forth growen; and more kindely love have I to that place than to any other in yerth, as every kindely creture hath full appetite to that place of his kindely engendrure, and to wilne reste and pece in that stede to abide.

Geoffrey Chaucer.

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A Mother Sits by the Fire

Womanliness means only motherhood

By F. BRITTEN AUSTIN

A CLOCK struck six in thin, silvery notes, somewhere in the darkness of the fitfully illuminated room. Outside, a winter wind rattled the window panes. The sounds made no impression on her consciousness. She sat withdrawn from contact with the world, her eyes fixed on the glowing heart of the fire where she forgot she looked. She forgot where she was, lost the sense of time in a reverie where the past re-enacted itself so vividly as to obscure the present. Only, like a part of herself, not needing the verification of a glance, was she conscious of the baby she had rocked to sleep in the cradle by the side of her chair, one hand still drooping pendent toward it. There was a brimming spring of happiness in her heart.

Her thoughts seemed to exteriorise themselves as they played, released from check, in front of her dreamy mind. She looked at them rather than thought them, saw them curiously vivid—flitting glimpses of that quiet, well-ordered household beyond the closed door that for a month she had had to trust to function without her direction—of that moment (how far back it seemed !—not just a month, surely !) when Rudolph's strong arm had supported her up the staircase and she had fought down the fluttering fear of the woman who knows her hour is come—of doctors and nurses—of memories she would not look at, already half-obliterated—of the doctor's face smiling at her from a cloud of pain that had suddenly broken: "You have your boy!"; she would hear his voice as long as she lived—of that inexpressible moment when she had first looked down at the little bundle close against her side, had seen the tiny little strange face, miraculously alive, miraculously owing its life to her ! The fire went blurry through inexplicable tears.

There came another vision—Rudolph bending over the beribboned cradle, while she watched him from the bed, in a curious suspense for his first word of comment. He looked to her, spoke, sententious as ever: "Looks all right!" If only he could have been just a tiny bit enthusiastic ! He had come across to her, looked in her eyes with that funny look of his. "And now you have got everything in the world you want, old lady!" Had she? She pondered Rudolph.

Were all married couples like that? she wondered. Sometimes they seemed so close together—and then they went poles asunder, unbridged gulfs between them. It was disconcerting. Her heart chilled as she realised how much of a stranger he was sometimes, a stranger she repelled with a little aversion she would not admit to herself. Was it her fault? It had not been like that when the baby was coming. They had been so closely knit that it seemed nothing could sever them. But since—it seemed a stranger who had kissed her that morning, told her she was still young and very, very beautiful, and she had broken from his arms at a murmur from the cradle. He ought to understand ! She dismissed the thought of Rudolph, stifled a funny little uneasiness of conscience in herself.

Nothing should interfere with her enjoyment of this hour. Only too rarely did nurse go out, leave her to undisturbed solitude with that gurgling baby who was her very, very own. She thrilled at the realisation. In a few days now the duties of life would begin again for her. But for the moment she was free—free to steep herself in the quiet ecstasy of happy motherhood. He stirred; slept again. She stared into the fire, saw visions.

What would he be, this boy of hers? Clever, of course, like his father—big, strong, handsome—chivalrous to women. She saw men admiring him, giving him that blunt man's friendship that, womanlike, she could never get quite to understand. She saw him overtopping, outshining them all. She imagined careers for him—abandoned them one after another at the moment of

success as insufficiently successful. But, whatever he was — however dazzlingly distinguished from his fellows, he was still her boy—her boy who came to his mother with loving, grateful eyes, sharing his life with her, as happily proud of her as she was of him.

The bundle in the cradle stirred again. She looked down upon it with wet, shining eyes, slipped a finger into the tight clutch of that tiny hand.

"Oh, Peter, Peter!" She shook her head at him as though to tease him, her voice a loving murmur. "Do you know why I called you Peter? It was very, very wicked of your wicked mother. I said to myself as I first looked at you, 'Thou art Peter, and on this rock I build my—happiness!'"

¶

THE last of them had gone. The sudden quietness closed on her. As she turned from the door, a strange woman, in unrelieved black to her throat, moved in the wall mirror, caught her eyes. She stared at her for a moment before self-recognition dawned in her semi-paralysed mind. She sat down abruptly in the shock of renewed realisation, buried her face in her hands. Rudolph!—Rudolph!

Yet she could not weep. After a timeless lapse, where her soul reeled through blackness, her hands pressed convulsively tight upon the eyes that burned against her brain, she raised her head, her fingers hot and dry as she dropped them from her brow. She sat immobile, staring in front of her. The ghosts of hallucinations played over her fevered senses, brain echoes of familiar sounds that startled her with their unreal reality—the quick firm footfall of a man who springs upstairs, her own name called cheerily from the door. She listened, in spite of herself. Where should have been those familiar tones, there was a void. She would never hear them again.

She would never hear that step—that voice—again. Never again would she see that face which almost limned itself before her eyes and disappeared bafflingly before she could attain visualisation. She had seen it for the last time before they carried out that wooden case. Rudolph!—Rudolph! She looked toward his photograph, unable to credit that a human being could disappear so utterly, her brain numbed in the presence of the mystery of death.

The door opened stealthily. A shock of short, fair curls, a pair of wondering blue eyes came cautiously through the gap at a level with the handle. She sat motionless, as though under a mantle of ice that held her prisoned, staring with dry eyes into a futurity that was blank.

"Mummy!" There was a rush of little feet across the room. A pair of warm little arms flung themselves impulsively round her neck. A little face came close against hers, cheek against cheek, snuggling to her. "Mummy! You do want me, don't you? Nursie said you didn't!"

She looked at him, and frozen fountains broke up in her. The ice vanished from the arms that clasped him instinctively.

"Peter! Peter boy!" Her voice came with the first sob of that emotion that had been frost-dammed in her. "I want you more—much more—than ever I did!"

"Mummy! *Darling* mummy!" He hugged and kissed her in happy reassurance.

There was a little silence while she held him close. He looked up at her.

"Mummy! When is Daddy going to be better?"

She must tell him! The task terrified her.

"Peter dear—Daddy is better—but he has gone—gone right away—with the angels." She swallowed.

She had expected a wild, convulsive outburst of grief. He looked at her in grave surprise.

"Daddy won't come back?" he asked.

She shook her head, scarcely able to speak.

"No, dear."

Her emotion touched him to a consolatory indignation.

"Mummy!" He threw himself close against her. "Mummy! I won't go away from you. I won't leave you—ever! Mummy darling, you've still got me!"

A flood came up in her—an immense gratitude. A vow registered itself, sacred for life. She crushed him to her passionately, pressed her lips speechlessly upon his curly head.

He looked up to her, protestingly.

"Mummy!—you're crying on me!"

She smiled at him.

II

SHE looked out of the window of the little house in the half-built suburban road. A receding motor car swung round the

corner, disappeared. She was trembling. The man's voice, pleasantly masculine in its persuasive appeal, still rang in her ears. She found herself looking at a memory of his strong face, his sympathetic eyes. How they had lit up when she had come into the room whither the little maidservant had shown him! And she had never suspected — Geoffrey Dane, Rudolph's friend!—his executor who for these seven long years had so loyally watched over her little capital without a hint that he was more than a friend to her! He was suddenly different.

Something stirred in the depths of her. She almost yielded to the impulse to look in the mirror, to see whether she was still as young and good-looking as, smiling at her self-deprecation, he had said she was. Could she be happy with him? The answer was an instinctive affirmative. She contemplated the strangeness of it; fitted, tentatively, the new name to herself—Mrs. Dane.

"I shall hope while you think it over," he said, as he departed. Yet she had given him little grounds for hope. What had withheld her? Rudolph? Rudolph was shadowy in her memory, needed a glance at his photograph to be questioned with any certitude. No reproach for disloyalty looked at her from the frame. He would probably have counselled her to accept. She turned again to the window, looked for Peter, already overdue from afternoon school.

Peter! That was the touchstone. Not for herself, but for Peter, she must decide. For her the world held only one reality, that twelve-year-old boy whose mere step outside the door made her heart beat faster. Other existences were but shadows, of significance only in so far as they ministered to him. He was a good boy, she told herself, even if he was a little wild. She was glad he was not precociously clever—those precocious boys never did anything when they grew up. There was nothing soft about him. Even while she winced under it, she admired the masterfulness of his spirit. No—that was not he coming round the corner. She wished he wouldn't be so late One read of so many accidents!

Peter! . . . What would Peter say? More important, how would such a change affect Peter? Geoffrey Dane's words echoed in her, "I'll treat him as my own son." He was certainly a very wealthy man. But there might be later children of his own. . . . It wasn't safe to count on money like that. Besides, anyway, Peter would have Rudolph's money. She had to pinch to keep the capital intact, but it was and would be intact for him. Money could not determine this problem.

There was another thing. It had been lurking in the back of her mind. She pulled it out now, bravely, and looked at it. "In any case, the boy ought to go away to school, you know."

Geoffrey Dane had said it kindly enough, but the words had rung an alarm bell in her heart. Did he mean to separate them? . . . Part her from the boy to slip into his place? A blind antagonism had leaped up in her. He was apparently quite disinterested, however; concerned only with the boy's welfare. "It's not good for him to be brought up by a woman, particularly one who loves him perhaps too much!"

He had smiled at her. She could not love him too much—that was absurd!—but there was a truth in the first clause that would already have been familiar had she allowed herself to admit it. Peter needed discipline —a man's authority. But to send him away to the unknown hazards of a school!

The view from the window ceased to exist as she pondered the problem. She thrilled with a sudden solution. If—if she accepted, she could make a compromise. She would marry Geoffrey Dane on condition that she kept her boy! With a man to hold him in hand, he need not go to boarding school. If he was firm, Geoffrey Dane was justice itself, and always kind. It was the ideal influence. Peter never dared to be rude to her when Geoffrey Dane was present. She saw, suddenly, those sympathetic eyes looking at her as no man's eyes had looked at her since Rudolph died—and thrilled queerly with something that was more than gratitude. She slid off the burden of a responsibility that had grown too heavy for her — surrendered her tired self, in anticipation, to his arms. With him, life would be easy, happy. She smiled, unconsciously, as she had not smiled for years.

There he was! . . . Peter came round the corner, whistling jauntily, swinging his satchel, flinging it after a cat that fled from him. She hastened to warn the maid to prepare his tea.

She was in the dining-room when he entered—he hated to see her looking out for him. He knew that she frowned at his

muddy boots but affected a superb indifference.

"You are late, dear," she said, as she kissed him.

He slipped from her embrace, dropped himself to a seat at the table.

"I was playing with some other chaps," he said, in a tone which indicated this was the limit of concession toward apology.

The meal commenced. She watched him as he ate, hungrily. She must tell him. But how? A nervous flutter within her almost inhibited speech. She made the effort.

"Mr. Dane has been here this afternoon, Peter," she said, trying to keep her voice normal.

He did not look up from the jam to which he helped himself.

"That chap seems always to be loafing round here lately." His tone was that gruff ungraciousness which he knew hurt her. "Any one would think he was after you, Mother."

She was silent. He looked up, disconcertingly suspicious eyes on her.

"I say, Mother, that's not what he's after, is it?" he said, sharply. "I don't want any rotten stepfather!"

She could not answer. She bit her lip, her eyes filling with tears.

The sight of them touched the better nature in him. He jumped up from his chair, came round to her impulsively, put his arms around her neck.

"Sorry, Mother." What a big understanding boy he was! "But you don't surely mean you want to marry Mr. Dane?"

She looked up at him through her tears.

"Peter—Peter dear—I—oh, I don't know!"

He embraced her tightly, squeezed her resolution from her as he caressed her.

"Mo her, don't be silly—you don't want to marry any one. What on earth for? We don't want any one else. I've got you—and you've got me. And that's all we want, isn't it?—just each other?"

She had a vision of a little curly-haired boy running to her in her grief, heard a childish voice: "Mummy darling, I won't leave you—ever!" A self-reproach came up in her; she smothered it for one last effort to be sure.

"Peter darling, don't you like Mr. Dane?"

"I can't stick him!" The answer was passionate in its vehemence.

It slammed a gate in her. She looked like a prisoner into those unrelenting young eyes above her.

"All right, Peter dear, I won't marry—any one."

"Promise?"

"I promise."

He contemplated her for a moment.

"There's no need to look so miserable about it, Mother. Can't you smile?"

She smiled.

He resumed his seat, reached for the bread-and-butter.

Another thought flashed into her, almost made her heart stop. Her compromise had failed!

She steadied her voice before she spoke.

"Peter dear, would you like to go to boarding school?"

His face lit up.

"Rath—er!"

III

HE was so big, so authoritative, that a fear of him mingled with her love. As he sat there, puffing irritably at his pipe, she could not reconcile him with the thought that once she had held him in her lap. His angry words still rang in her ears.

"I know you'd like to make a milk-sop of me, Mother—but it can't be done!"

Was she wrong to try and curb him, to try and guide him? For all the twenty-two years of which he was so conscious, he was still only a boy. She despaired at his resentment of her feeble effort to use an unaccustomed authority. Had she done right in sending him away from her to boarding school, to the University?

The first, yes; but the second——? Mr. Dane had disapproved of it, had prophesied the extravagances, the depletions of her capital that it made her tremble to remember. He had been ashamed to bring his college friends to the little house. Behind a closed door in her memory were long hours of lonely tears. She had no resentment. She gloried in these sacrifices if they had been for his good. But had they been? A cold fear gripped her heart as she watched his jaunty assumption of a man of the world.

She was frightened for him. Surely a University education ought to have facilitated his start in life! It was true he had not specialised, had no particular qualifications. But he ought to have made powerful friends. Her mind turned

abruptly from this subject. She knew none of Peter's friends, imagined them only with dread from the hints that escaped him. If only he would not be so big in his ideas, would be content to make a beginning with whatever work he could find! At the same time she sympathised with the humiliation of his pride she herself had counselled. A secret resentment sharpened itself in her. Considering all things, Mr. Dane might well have offered him more than an ordinary junior clerkship in his office.

He looked at her. It was as if he read her thought.

"And if you think I'm going to quill-drive in old Dane's office, you're mistaken, Mother!"

She found her voice.

"What do you propose to do, then, Peter?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, something will turn up! I'm sure to get a chance—a real chance—presently. That's, if you don't spoil it!"

She blanched under the stab.

"Peter dear—do I spoil your chances for you?"

It was as though she bared her breast for him.

He shifted his glance uncomfortably, shielded himself under bad temper.

"You're spoiling this one. Just because of the miserable money!"

Mr. Dane's warning voice sounded in her ear like that of a watching spirit.

"It would mean selling more stock, Peter," she said, quietly.

He glared at her.

"Oh, of course, Mother—if you're always going to throw that old business in my face! You know perfectly well a man couldn't live in my college on my allowance!"

His eyes dropped under her steady look.

"Have I ever reminded you, Peter?" she said, gently. "I don't want to remember it. But I do want to understand what sort of a chance this is, if it is a chance."

"I don't say it's a chance now, but it's pretty sure to lead to one. A fellow like Jack Freeman hears of all sorts of good things—and I should be a fool to refuse this chance of a trip with him."

Her eyes probed him.

"Jack Freeman's father is a millionaire, Peter, I know—but is your friend likely to hear of good things for you in Paris?"

He flushed.

"Well, I don't say this is a business trip, Mother—it's just a jolly party. It gives me a chance to see a bit of the world, and it keeps me in the social set of useful people like Jack Freeman, Herman Morris, and the others."

"Herman Morris is going too?" Her tone was sharp with alarm.

"Yes." Obviously, he could have bitten off his tongue for this unlucky slip, but she noted, with a sudden gratitude, that still he could not lie to her. All through his boyhood, this had been her touchstone.

"Peter, after that chorus-girl case—would you like to introduce Herman Morris to your mother?"

She saw the colour heighten round his eyes.

"I'm not responsible for other people's morals, Mother—neither are you!"

A sudden, dreadful suspicion flashed into her. She rose, without knowing it, from her chair.

"Peter, tell me the truth. Will there be *only* men in this party to Paris?"

He did not answer.

She felt as though she were going to faint. The room went round in the instant before she mastered herself, found the support of a chair back.

"Peter—Peter——" Speech failed her.

He also rose, flamed out with that sudden anger of his.

"Look here, Mother—you don't seem to realise that I am a grown man. You can't treat me any longer like a child!"

Her eyes never left his face.

"And—and you would break into our capital for—for that?"

"I tell you—I'm not a boy. I'm a man—and I'm going to run my own life as I like! I know what I'm doing."

She summoned up all her courage, fought off the dizziness.

"And if I refuse—refuse to give you this money?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"There are people who will lend it to me. It is better that you should understand, Mother. I am out of leading strings."

She clutched at one last hope.

"And if I ask you—beg of you—not to go?"

His answer was coldly brutal.

"I am sorry, Mother, but I have already promised."

"You are going—in any case?"

"In any case. I am of age. I claim my liberty, Mother."

She took a deep, trembling breath,

difficult in the anguish that seemed like a cramp upon her heart, looked at this stranger—this stranger who was her Peter—in a despair that had no words. For this moment of repudiation she had sacrificed her entire life. The mockery of it smote her. She craved to fall dead, and the mercy was withheld. Peter!—her child Peter had gone like a dream from which one wakes. With an inarticulate cry, she went, seeing nothing, out of the room.

It was her bedroom to which she went like an automaton, obeying a blind instinct to be alone with her hurt. She fumbled with one hand out along the bed—and then suddenly she went down on her knees, her face between her hands. She prayed. She prayed as in all her life she had never prayed before. She had given him all this earthly existence of hers—what more could she give him? The thought flashed into her.

"O God, do with my soul as Thou wilt, but save him!"

Prayer ceased in her, but still she knelt with hands over her face. Thought awoke suddenly, moved with an unexperienced swiftness and lucidity, leaping from an echo of his words still audible in her. He was a grown man! He was no longer a child. She had trusted him insufficiently—had thought to keep him in those leading strings he resented. A sudden resolve formed itself in her. She would trust him to the extreme of completeness! If she could not thus trust him, life were better ended for her. He claimed to be a man—she would give him his chance to prove it.

She rose to her feet, went to the writing desk in the corner of her room, sat down to it, took a sheet of paper and wrote.

"DEAR MR. DANE:

"*Will you please take this as authority to transfer to Peter all the securities you hold for me? I feel that now he is of man's age he should undertake a man's responsibility*——"

She looked round sharply in the sudden, instinctive knowledge of a presence at her back. It was Peter, looking over her shoulder.

"—*I have implicit trust in him.*" Her pen flew over the paper. She signed her name. Then she turned to Peter, handed him the letter speechlessly, trying to keep her hand still. He pushed it back.

"No, Mother," he said. She stared at him. There was a new tone in his voice. "I've had enough of your money." He spoke evidently with an effort, overcame a shamefacedness for which she loved him. "I want to tell you something. I've been thinking—and I've decided to go into Mr. Dane's office if he'll have me."

She sprang to her feet, was held, a little thing, in his big strong arms.

"Peter!"

"And, Mother"—he looked down into her eyes, checked, boyishly diffident of the words that meant so much to her—"I've not played the game to you, the best little mother in the world. Forgive me for making you unhappy."

"Peter! Peter darling!" she said, the tears streaming down her face, "it's the happiest moment of my life!"

IV

SHE smiled happily as, duster in hand, she went over the little house, the last touch given. It was a picture of domestic neatness, fresh and pretty with its new curtains against the sun. She wondered what Peter would say when he saw it; imagined herself in the hug of his arms, held there for the good-humoured, affectionate reproach, "Mother, you work too hard!"

But he would be pleased. She was innocently excited at the surprise it would be for him. She had been wise to persuade him to go away alone for that month. He deserved a real holiday, free from the constraint her presence inevitably laid on him. He had had a hard time at the office. He was an important man there, now. Mr. Dane was pleased with him, had hinted, on one of those rare occasions when she saw her old friend, at a possible partnership in the future. Her mind leaped back years to a dreadful evening when Peter had hesitated at what she now saw to have been crossroads. She could scarcely identify that rebellious boy with the steady-eyed young man who had kissed her good-bye. Eight years! He had made good from the start.

She thrilled with pride in him, reverted to that possible partnership. That would mean more money—Peter would probably want a larger, more fashionable house. She looked affectionately at the little home about her. So much of her life had been passed there and, looking back, it seemed a happy life. She would be well satisfied to live there all her years—with Peter.

With Peter—but suppose (she forced herself to admit it as an academic possibility against the instinctive revolt of her mind)

suppose Peter married! She saw herself fleeing as into the wilderness. She could not live alone in that house haunted by all their happy days together.

She banished the unworthy thought. Of course, she would be glad if he found a wife—a *good* wife. She stopped and contemplated, under pretext of dusting it, the photograph of him in her bedroom. Perhaps it would never happen. He was still her boy, bless him! the boy who had kept his childish promise had never left her. He had told her once that she was the only woman in the world who meant anything to him. She kissed the glass over his dear face.

There was his key in the lock! She hid the duster, glanced to see if she was tidy for him. What would he say to the clean, new-pin aspect of the house, to the new curtains? She could scarcely wait in anticipation of his surprise, of his first words of praise. She heard the maid tell him she was upstairs, heard his quick tread as he leaped up the staircase. He burst into the room, curiously boyish, his face all smiles.

"Hallo, Mother!"

"Peter dear!" She was in his arms. "You have enjoyed yourself?"

"Heaps!" He looked down at her. "Little Mother, I've something to show you downstairs."

A present, perhaps? Dear boy! She smiled at him.

"I had something to show you, too—upstairs and down, Peter." He looked puzzled. "Don't you notice anything?"

He glanced around him, shook his head.

"No. It all looks just the same." He saw the disappointment in her face. "What is it, Mother? Sorry I'm dense!"

"Never mind, dear." She would let him discover for himself; it was only a pleasure deferred. One couldn't expect a man to notice domestic things at once.

"Well, come downstairs, then. I've got a surprise for you."

She let herself be led, with his arms around her, to the staircase; descended to the turn of the stairs. She stopped suddenly as though a sword had gone through her. Standing in the hall was a girl, at first glance young and pretty under her summer hat.

She turned to him. "Peter!" But Peter had already leaped down the stairs, was leading the girl toward her. She forced herself to continue her descent. It was as though the earth quaked and opened.

Peter was speaking.

"Forgive me for not writing to you about it, Mother. I wanted it to be a great surprise for you." He radiated a happiness that could see nothing beyond itself. "This is Ruth. I want you to love her—for she has promised to be my wife!"

She looked at the girl's face, met a pair of soft brown eyes.

"Mrs. Harcourt,"—the girl's voice was sympathetic, on a note that disarmed antagonism—"I told Peter he ought to have written to you." She called him Peter already! "Can you forgive me?"

Peter threw his arms round both of them, pulled them together. He laughed boyishly.

"Forgive? Nonsense! What has Mother to forgive? We're all going to be happy together—the three of us—happier than we've been in our lives, aren't we, Mother?"

She found herself holding the girl's hand as she looked into those brown eyes for discovery of the real woman behind that pretty face. Peter's happiness depended on that unknown. Suddenly she bent forward, took her in her arms with a kiss that sanctioned.

"Be good to him, dear," she said.

Peter looked down at her wet eyes, his enthusiasm dashed a little.

"You're pleased, Mother, aren't you?"

She achieved a heroic smile to reassure him.

"Yes, dear."

She led the girl into the drawing-room, left them on the pretext of ordering the tea. Peter followed her out.

"You *are* pleased, Mother, aren't you?" He held her shoulders with his big strong hands as his eyes questioned her. "You'll love her when you know her. Don't think you're losing me. You'll often come and stay with us when we're married—and it'll be like old times again."

She turned a mute face up to him for his kiss.

"Go back to her, dear," she managed to say.

She invented pretexts to linger in that kitchen. Not for some minutes could she nerve herself for the ordeal of seeing them together—and then, suddenly, she could not stay away.

She went along to the drawing-room. The door was half open. Peter's voice, a strange new tone in it, arrested her on the threshold. He held his affianced in his

arms, looking up to him as he looked down to her.

"There's never been any real thing in my life till now, dearest," he said, as he bent down for the meeting of their lips.

On his face was a look his mother had never seen.

She crept away into the next room, pretty with the new curtains, sank into a chair, sobbed suddenly as though her heart would break.

Her thoughts ran on. It seemed a long way back now, that pretty little house where Peter had grown up from babydom to manhood. It was lonely in this diminutive apartment whither she had removed the little furniture she had not given Peter for his home. He rarely visited her. Weeks passed without his seeing her while she sat and listened for that sharp ring at the bell which should announce his presence. She did not blame him. He worked hard at the office, and after business Ruth, of course, liked to have him. They almost never came together. Ruth pointed her temporary relinquishment by allowing him to come alone when he did come.

It was very lonely, and as she sat she wondered whether it had all been worth while. She looked back along a vista of sacrifice—of sacrifices of which Peter knew nothing, or had long ago forgotten. All her own life she had immolated herself for him, and at the end he thought (it was right that he should, of course!) only of another woman. Had she married Geoffrey Dane all those years ago—she remembered Peter's petulant, childish jealousy to which she had weakly surrendered—she might have been sitting now by a companionable fireside, and Peter, married probably in any case, would not have been more lost to her than he was. Tears of self-pity came into her eyes. There was a pointless irony in life, she thought.

A resentment stirred in her. They lived selfish lives, Peter and Ruth, without a child to cement their home. It was Ruth's fault, of course (pleasure-loving little thing!) If she could have a little grandchild to prattle round her! She almost hated Ruth for withholding it.

¶

SEVEN o'clock struck in thin, silvery notes from somewhere in the darkness. The fire had gone down. The winter wind rattled at the window panes. She bestirred herself, put on another log, switched on the light which revealed the dreary solitude of her room.

There was a sharp ring at the outer bell. Peter! Her heart leaped. She almost ran to the door, opened it. It was Peter but—she noted it with a little stab of disappointment—Ruth was with him.

Peter smiled at her, the affectionate old Peter!

"Ruth has something to tell you, Mother," he said as he kissed her after she had closed the door behind them.

The pretty young wife nodded brightly to her, her face somehow more sympathetic than usual. The two women went into the bedroom for the younger to remove her hat and suddenly the daughter-in-law bent and whispered in her ear.

The old lady gave a start of joy.

"Oh, my dear, my dear!" she cried, throwing her arms about her and kissing her in a sudden annihilation of all hostility. "I'm so glad! I'm glad for you. A woman can't know what happiness is"—she smiled in an ecstasy of transfigured memory—"until she is a mother!"

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The Little Widow

By REGINALD RIGBY

DON'T know Mrs. Woodby Innit?—Oh, come
now, why, you must.
She was—at least she thought she was—a slice of
upper crust;
A widow, like a motor-car, geared up with
different speeds,
Slow, medium, fast,
Perhaps a "past";
Who knows, who heeds?

Well, now, Mrs. Woodby Innitt, just as widows
often do,
Kept both her optics open wide to find a "Number
Two";
And hard-up handsome bachelors all thought they
might do worse
Than wading in
To try and win
Her heart—and purse.

Little Mrs. Woodby Innitt was not an arrant
fool—
A widow very seldom is, at least, not as a rule—
So put the gentle "kybosh" on their matrimonial
dreams,
Because she meant
To circumvent
A duke, it seems.

Now His Grace the Duke of Spoof was patrician
through and through,
A man of blood, the best of blood, the deepest
Prussian blue,
With bearings "*Gules*, upon a field a he-goat
guidee *or*,"
For crest a flirt
Improper, *vert;*
For motto "Haw! "

And though Mrs. Woodby Innitt used her every art
and wile—
She'd some good looks, a figure, too, the Decorated
style—
She couldn't get within a mile of Spoof and all his
set:
Though Hampstead's high
It cannot vie
With Mayfair—yet.

But as truth is often stranger than a tale of pure
romance,
What didn't happen by design took place at last by
chance;
The widow, much to her surprise, once entertained
the duke,
To supper, too,
And quite a *deux*,
Although a fluke.

As the English aristocracy is very poor, tho' proud,
Quite humble ways of earning bread are tacitly
avowed,
And noble names may now be seen outside a London
shop,
One's but to look:
The lady cook
Has come to stop.

Thus the Lady Evelina Legge, as poor as any
mouse,
Took a post as lady cook within the widow's
Hampstead house;
She dropped her name of Legge the while and
called herself Miss Jones,
Cooked chops and steaks,
Made pies and cakes,
Grilled devilled bones.

And the widow on her afternoons would talk to
all her crones
About the treasure she had got—the *soi-disant* Miss
Jones:
"A lady cook, I think she's called, but makes no
sort of fuss.
A lady? oh,
Not *quite*, you know,
Not one of *us!*"

In the kitchen of the widow on a certain Sunday
eve
When all the maids except the cook were out on
weekly leave,
The latter had a visitor, her cousin, quite by
chance:
"It wouldn't do,
Dear Dick, for you
To call *en prince.*"

So the Duke of Spoof, her cousin, who had come
the cook to see,
Had entered by the area, and thought it quite a
spree;
For dukes can't often do such things—who reads
of it in books,
Or even hears
Of ducal peers
Who call on cooks?

Now the Lady Evelina and her cousin were in
love,
And very soon forgot about the widow up above.
They talked and laughed the while they laid the
supper things for two;
They ate their fill
Then, better still,
Played "bill and coo."

The Little Widow

They were comfortably seated in a large old-fashioned chair,
The kind of seat that's built for two when no one else is there;
The kitchen and all earthly things seemed miles and miles away:
Time, space and such,
Don't matter much
When love holds sway./

As the lovers were just finishing a very lengthy squeeze
The door was softly opened, as it is at times like these,
And enter—yes, the widow, wrath writ upon her face;
She gave the cook
A freezing look
Then saw—His Grace!

Little Mrs. Woodby Innitt in a trice had slammed the door
And rushed up in a hurry to her green and gold boudoir,
Where prone upon the sofa stretched she wept salt tears of shame
To think the Duke
Preferred the cook
Miss What's-her-name!

Then she rose up in her majesty, this stately British snob,
And tore his Grace's photograph in halves (it cost a bob),
And tossed it in the fireplace, the only thing to do,
And when her pride
Was satisfied,
She wept anew.

Little Mrs. Woodby Innitt when recovered from the shock
Soon gave her lady cook what's called by vulgar folk "the knock."
To think Miss Jones, *Miss Jones, her cook*, a lady cook at that,
Dared flirt with Spoof
Beneath her roof:
The forward cat!

Wily Mrs. Woodby Innitt went from Hampstead in a huff,
Of cooks and dukes who called on them she's had about enough.
She's married Bloggs the draper's son, a brainless jackanapes,
And now she scoffs
At all the "toffs."
What? Sour grapes?

This Thing Called Life

LIFE is like a tale; what makes it of value is not its length but its goodness.
SENECA.

LIFE is the greatest good, and death the worst evil. HEINE.

GLORY is bought at the cost of happiness; pleasure at the cost of health; favour at the cost of independence. PIERRE GASTON.

"To him that lives well," answered the hermit, "every form of life is good."
JOHNSON.

THE vanity of human life is like a river, constantly passing away, yet constantly coming on. POPE.

LIFE is but a day. What does it matter whether it finishes towards evening or towards the morning? VOLTAIRE.

"SAIREY," says Mrs. Harris, "sech is life. Vich likewise is the hend of all things."
DICKENS.

ONE'S real life is so often the life that one does not lead. OSCAR WILDE.

A Different Country

The dividing line—and a reunion

By JOSEPHINE DASKHAM BACON

WHEN Everitt came to himself he was leaning against a tree. It was all a daze to him at first; his hands, clasped round the rough bark, surprised him, his legs shook.

"How did I get over here?" he puzzled.

Suddenly he remembered; his mental operations had always been very quick.

"Oh, yes; the accident," he thought, his brain working with an almost creaky attempt to co-ordinate. "But we went over, didn't we? The car tipped, certainly. How did I ever fall clear? And at that speed, too! They side-swiped us, besides. To think of me getting up and walking! For heaven's sake!"

He loosened his grip on the tree and turned himself cautiously. No bones broken? His head all right? No blood, even? Amazing! His coat, a heather-grey mixture, was not dusty; his green cardigan was still neatly buttoned. His grey cap was on his head, even.

His eyeballs turned slowly, like his body and his brain, but no wonder. Yes, there was the car on the bank, and only half over; it had rested on a great boulder.

"Lord, if I'd struck that!" he muttered.

Where was Elsie, then? George wouldn't be able to speak to him, he supposed, after this, if he'd killed his wife and saved himself. He took a few feeble steps forward, for the shock that had sent him so far had left him very uncertain, and saw, streaming out from the tonneau, a light brown motor coat; a woman's arm and hand flung out along the grass. His heart stopped.

"It's all over with her, I'm afraid," he muttered. "I must go and see. Did the brute get away? Ditch us like that and run off; and his fault too? That cursed Frenchman!" He swore.

But as he went towards the car two men suddenly ran up over the brim of the bank. One he recognized for the driver of the car that had hit them, the other he had never seen. They were talking loudly to each other, so nervous that they didn't realize that they were screaming at the same time.

"Pull her out! Tip her back, there! Get away, can't you? Look out; don't jar her!" they cried in a confused babble. "Hold on to his head—there comes Harry—easy now, Harry; easy with him!"

"Then they're English, too," he thought. "That's good."

A third man hurried up with a motor rug over his arm.

"His head? Whose head?" Everitt wondered. "Did we get one of them?"

He was now within five yards of the car, but he couldn't call out to them; he hadn't the strength. As he watched them they leaned into the front seat, and in a sudden silence lifted out, with a really remarkable deftness and care, the body of a man.

"Who's that?" Everitt muttered, so confused now that in the effort to remember who had been with them he dug his fingers into a small tree on the edge of the little grove. They laid the body on the rug, and it lay motionless, a tall man in a heather-grey suit with a green cardigan and a grey cap. His face was pure white; from his forehead a narrow stream of blood still flowed down the cheek.

"Wh-wh-why, that's me!" he gasped, and suddenly a violent nausea threatened him. He turned away his eyes. In the silence a man's voice came clearly across to him.

"Well? Any chance for him?"

"Nothing. He's gone, poor chap. Head crushed. Let's have a look at the woman." She groaned.

Everitt forced his eyes towards them. They took off their hats for a moment, looked at the body, and moved back to where the third man was pouring something from a flask into Elsie's mouth. Her arm moved and she groaned again.

"She's alive all right, sir," the man cried joyfully.

Everitt turned his arm round the little tree and swayed there.

"I'm dead, then! I'm dead!" he mumbled.

The man on the rug lay stiff and motionless. The afternoon light fell in wide fan-like beams through the strange green trunks of the trees; all the trees in France had that green theatrical quality, as if they had stained them to make them more decorative. He stood there, his arm round one of those trees, his feet on the ground, all carpeted with the thick rich green of the ivy, his hat on his head, the breath in his lungs. And yet he was dead.

"It's like that, then," he thought. "It's like that!"

He left the tree and walked, a little shakily but with perfect ease, up to the car.

"What are they going to say when they see me?" he wondered. "It's bound to give them a turn! But I can't help it—I must tell them who I am. I must help about Elsie."

They were lifting her carefully into the car, and it occurred to him that he must not risk shocking them just then. Their backs were turned towards him, and he halted.

"The spine seems to be all right," said one of the men, "and she's moved both her arms. Thank the Lord I had a lot of this to do in '17. Of course there may be anything internally—anything. You can't tell. But she was thrown clear, you see. He was jammed in, poor devil."

Elsie was lying now on the back seat of a heavy limousine; she groaned steadily and moved her head. Everitt stepped up to them.

"I beg your pardon," he said, his voice trembling, "but I——"

"Wouldn't you know there'd be nobody on the road?" said the man. "It's like this in France. Let's pick that poor fellow up and send him on with Henry."

"Look here!" cried Everitt irritably, putting his hand firmly on the man's shoulder. "Will you please listen to me a minute? I'm —"

"All right, Harry, we'll help you," said the man, moving his shoulder from Everitt's grip. "Get right into Paris, I would; give 'em names and numbers and everything. It was certainly his fault, poor fellow; he never even sounded his horn."

"Will you listen?" cried Everitt, stamping on the road and moving in front of them. "What's the matter with you? Don't you see me? Are you crazy?"

"Easy does it, sir," said the chauffeur picking up the legs of the body on the ground. "Take the hands up, will you, mister? It's not so bad if we can save the lady."

Glaring, quivering, menacing, he stood in their path, shaking his fists, and suddenly in the awful realization, screaming at them, urging them, cursing them. His voice echoed down the empty road, white between its poplars, but they never turned their heads. They neither heard nor saw him, though he struck them, raging; nor could they feel his hands, though he tried to wrench their own away from the body they were carrying. He whirled about and fell, senseless, in the ditch by the road.

¶

WHEN he came to himself he was quite alone. All that violence and terror might have been one of the horrid nightmares that had occasionally haunted his childhood. He felt curiously calm, and recognized in himself a definite interest in the situation.

"How long will this last?" he wondered. "How about—heaven and all the rest of it? Not that it was ever very sensible, all that! Ah, here comes somebody!"

Two peasants, a man and a woman, were walking down the road, approaching him. He waited till they were close enough, then stepped out and spoke.

"*Bonjour, monsieur et madame!*" he said pleasantly, but they went past him, chattering; the woman had looked squarely into his eyes. With a great effort of the will he hurried ahead, and forced himself to stand straight in their path; in a moment they were the other side of him, without, apparently, touching him at all.

He wiped his wet forehead, and put back the handkerchief into his pocket.

"Well," he said, "that's that! Now where do we go from here? Have I got to walk back to Paris? I certainly don't see much point in hanging about this road all night! There's another woman, I don't think I'll bother about her, thank you!"

She had entered the main highway from the crossroad just beyond and, without glancing in his direction, hurried on ahead of him. Not a Frenchwoman, evidently;

there was something in the stride, in the way of holding the body, the poise of the head, even, that showed the Anglo-Saxon. And she carried her clothes very well for an Englishwoman. What on earth was she doing seventy-five kilometres and more from Paris, walking along the highway?

He caught up with her easily and, moved by an odd cynical impulse, put his hand on her shoulder.

"I know you can't see me, my dear girl," he said dryly, "but what on earth are you doing, all alone, I wonder?"

To his utter amazement she whirled about under his light touch and faced him, scarlet with anger.

"*Monsieur!*" she cried. "*Prenez garde!*"

Automatically, for he had nearly fallen under the double shock of her reception and her quick strong thrust, he pulled off his cap and moved away from her.

"I beg your pardon," he said faintly; "you must forgive me. I didn't realize. You can see me then?"

"See you?" she echoed, amazed, and the anger faded out of her eyes. A real terror dawned in them.

"She thinks I'm a lunatic!" he said to himself. "How horrible! And perhaps I am—to have had such a nightmare back there. I was probably crazy from shock. Oh, how can such things be?"

"See you?" she said again, and he marvelled at her quick recovery, her brave attempt to smile and conciliate him, her lightning glance all about them to see if any help was probable. "But why shouldn't I see you? You're an Englishman, aren't you? Do you know where we are? Is it far from Paris? I've managed to lose myself."

He could have jumped up and down and waved his cap for joy. And he had thought—he had thought—— Oh, the relief, the heavenly relief!

Still keeping a careful distance from her he answered, his voice trembling a little.

"We can't be far off Chartres," he said. "I'm a bit confused myself, to tell you the truth. I was—I was in a nasty little motor accident, and got spilled, and I've been tumbling around here like—like a sort of lunatic, trying to find out where I was and—who I was, if you can understand at all; and nobody seemed to pay any attention to me, and I got sort of—sort of—well, you'll have to excuse me, madam, that's all I can say. I'm not an apache nor a robber nor a lunatic, really, and I trust you'll believe that I haven't the remotest intention of doing you the least bit of harm in the world!"

She drew a long breath.

"I'm quite sure you haven't," she answered quietly. "You've had a bad shock, evidently. The peasants here are awfully rude if they don't understand you, you know. Here come some children, now; we'll——"

"Would you mind asking them?" he muttered, shaking. "I simply can't bear——"

"That's all right," she interrupted hastily. "I'm quite at home in French; I went to school here. Don't bother. It will be all right."

Five or six children were hurrying towards them, the girls in funny little red-and-blue jackets, the boys in sober black pinafores. She stepped out to them, extending her hand with a bright fifty-centime piece well in evidence between her thumb and finger.

"*Dites-donc, mes petits; comment ça va?*" she said cheerfully. "*Bonjour, tout le monde!*"

They ran on, chattering, with not so much as a glance for the tall grey-eyed woman in the long tan silk coat.

"*Attention, mes enfants!*" she cried, and moving lightly, with a long step, she stopped, ahead of them, opened her arms and caught the first two, a boy and a girl, as they ran. In a moment, without stopping, they appeared again, behind her back.

She stood there alone, her arms still extended, her face white and wondering; and Everitt, with an awful pang of pity and horror, ran to her and caught her as she staggered.

So that was it, then! That was why she saw him, spoke to him, felt him! Because she was like him; because——

"It's not possible!" he cried, and led her, leaning on him, to the roadside.

"What is it? Why wouldn't they—what isn't possible?" she asked confusedly. "What makes you look at me like that? Weren't they horrid? Oh, there comes a car! Stop it, will you?"

"Wait," he said gently; "wait a moment. I'll—I'll have to explain to you. No, it won't do any good; I couldn't stop them. They wouldn't see us, you see."

"They wouldn't see us? Why wouldn't they see us?"

"Because—because they're not like us. They're—they're different."

"Different? How are they different? Are you—are you——"

"No, I'm not crazy," he said; "I was never saner in my life. It's hard to tell you. Can't you remember anything, then? Can't you think what's happened to you? Don't you know?"

"What? What?" she whispered, turning her eyes up to him like a frightened child. "What is it you mean?"

"They're not like us," he said very low, holding her hands firmly. "They're alive, you see; and we——"

"We——"

"We're dead, my dear," he said, and caught her as she swayed over on him.

Her head, casqued in the tight little sport hat of the moment, lay easily on the bank, and he ran for the little brook that flowed on the edge of the wood, filled his cap with water and dabbled her forehead and cheeks with it.

"She may not thank me for that," he muttered grimly; "but there, she's so pale. There's none of that beastly paint to wash off!"

Soon she began to draw long sobbing breaths, and he braced himself for whatever scene might occur; but there was to be none, it seemed, for she only smiled faintly at him and put out her hand. Her hair, not brown, not red, not yellow, but a little of all three, was precisely the colour of her long curved eyebrows; her clear skin was very slightly flecked with tiny freckles, on her cheekbones, the tip of her nose, her chin. Her mouth was not small, but deeply curved and of a clear pink, rather than red. He judged her to be twenty-eight or thirty. She was not beautiful, certainly, perhaps not even handsome, by the exacting standards of his native country; but, on the other hand, she was certainly not plain. Interesting—was that it?

As she looked vaguely at him a soft rosy tint climbed over the pallor of her unconsciousness, and when she smiled he saw that to anyone who loved her she would be lovely.

"So it's just you and me?" she said gently, and he realized with relief that it was over with her and there was nothing more to fear.

"Just you and me," he repeated, holding her hand firmly and helping her to sit up beside him. "Haven't you any idea when it happened? Not if you don't feel like talking about it, of course——"

"But why not?" she asked calmly. "Only I can't see any sense in it, you know. There wasn't any accident. We were in the car, Jack and I—my brother-in-law—and he stopped, because he heard a knock. He got under the hood, and I stepped out a little ahead, to see the view, and—and that's all. I don't remember any more."

"But surely you did something; something happened. Was nobody else there?"

"No," she answered, thinking. "I was all alone on the road. There was a big sort of cable—wire or something—lying across the road, and I stooped down and picked it up, to throw it——"

"Ah, that's it!" he cried. "It was a charged wire! The storm last night! Oh, why did you do it?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"You think so?" she said quietly. "Yes, I suppose that was it. It never occurred to me, of course. And I was so angry when I found myself all alone in the wood; I thought Jack must have gone crazy, for he never even called after me! I was stupid, of course, and more or less shocked, for I just hurried on, to try to catch up with him." She sighed, straightened her hat, and rose, her hand still in his. "Shall we go on?" she said, and they walked on together. "How did it come to you?" she asked, and he told her briefly.

"And I must get back to Paris and find out about Elsie," he added; "she—she may have—— Only, how on earth are we going to get there?"

A little quiver ran through the hand he held, and glancing at her he saw that she was laughing.

"My father would have said we ought to fly there," she began, laughing outright now. "With crowns on our heads, and those ugly tea-gowns angels wear!"

"Don't be absurd!" he urged her, laughing and embarrassed. "I couldn't wear a tea-gown!"

"You'd have had to, according to father," she persisted, "but I can quite see that you'd look odd if you did."

Her spirits sank suddenly; she shivered and fell silent.

They were now in sight of a little wayside station for petrol and oil, and as they neared it she began to walk more quickly.

"I don't see why——" she began, and paused.

"What?" he asked. "Tell me!"

"If there should be a car with nobody in it why couldn't we get in and ride to Paris," she said slowly. "If nobody sees us."

He shrank a little.

"I'm afraid that might not be practical," he began, but she laughed again, a strange little laugh.

"Practical?" she said briefly. "What is practical—for us?"

"You may be right," he answered after a moment. "I'll try anything you say."

They stood by the door, listening to the gossip of the woman who rested near the tank, moving instinctively out of the way of the boy who tidied the little courtyard. After a few minutes of silence she began to talk hardily, and though it made him very nervous he tried to answer her, staring curiously at the boy all the while, who paid not the slightest attention to the strangers at his side, but swore softly at the *patron* who would not advance his wages by one night.

"And to think," Everitt burst out irritably, "that I have a thousand francs in my pocket! And they're no good at all!"

"But they're not real francs, you see," she said patiently.

"They're as real as I am!" he cried angrily.

"Are they?" she asked, and looked at him oddly.

He seemed to lose himself in her eyes, and the objects about them appeared to swing and sway. He forced his eyes away.

"Don't do that," he begged huskily, and took her hand; it was firm and warm.

A big French car swung up and halted; it was a luxurious sedan, quite empty. The chauffeur got down, opened the door, took out a box of matches from a little case, and left the door swinging.

"Now! Now!" she whispered, and pushing back the door she stepped lightly into the car. Everitt followed her.

"This is incredible!" he whispered. "If he finds us——"

"He won't find us, *mon pauvre ami*," she said calmly. "You can't seem to realize that!"

"But don't talk so loud!"

"Talk!" she repeated scornfully. "We could sing!"

And when the man took his seat again, after replacing the matches and closing the door, she actually sang the words of the music-hall song he whistled.

They flew along quickly. Everitt took out his watch, and it was four o'clock.

"We'll be home while it's light," he thought in a moment of forgetfulness; "and then—and then——"

His breath was cut as if by a knife. What was "then" to him? What did people do, like this? What was he supposed to do? How long would it last? He groaned and dug his nails into his palms. His forehead was damp again, and he wiped it impatiently. To sit there comfortably, bowling along towards Paris in a well-appointed motor, behind a correct chauffeur, with a well-dressed, good-looking woman beside him—and then to know that it was all a farce!

"What's the sense of it? Where's the good of it?" he tortured himself. "If I'm dead, for God's sake let me die and get it over! This is simply idiotic!"

Whether he had groaned aloud or whether she knew his thoughts, he could not tell, but she answered him quietly, her warm hand always in his—for it seemed their one hold on reality, their one assurance among all these hopeless uncertainties, thus to grasp each other.

"I don't suppose we can choose, you know. If this is the way it is, this is the way it is—isn't it? At least, one isn't alone. I went to school somewhere about here, I think. It was the loveliest old convent. There was a wonderful vegetable garden, and a fountain with a big copper pot on a chain. Such a darling old dog, always asleep in the sun there; his name was Amidor. They used to make the most heavenly *compote* of cherries, and we had it on fresh bread with unsalted butter. I used to eat it, and always look at the marigolds, because I thought it tasted better that way! Sœur Ambroisine was the head of the kitchen. Did you ever see one of those dark, French kitchens with the copper things shining, and the oak all black and polished? We had soup for breakfast, and a rich South American—from Brazil, she was—used to give me all her onions, and I gave her my carrots. I never liked carrots.

"But Sœur Marie-Josephine found us out and wouldn't let us; she said *le bon Dieu* didn't like to have people choose like that. He preferred us to take the soup as he sent it! 'In that case,' I said, 'one should eat

the vegetables raw.' I had no butter for three days."

The stream of her voice, low and pleasant with sudden drops into a grave contralto, flowed about his restless burning thoughts and cooled and comforted them.

Soon she was talking about music, which he loved, and a concert, when she had heard, a night or two ago, his favourite César Franck sonata.

"And a really good violinist—I mean, in the French sense—correct and well trained, you know. I sometimes wonder what they'd do, these people, if they heard a real orchestra, with a great conductor and beautiful instruments."

"They'd faint, probably," he answered satirically; "or think it was a little uncivilized, perhaps."

"That, I think. Did you ever hear real Tziganes play? Not what we have in our restaurants at home—they're mostly Italians—but real ones? I heard one play that sonata once."

She hummed the air, and he corrected her jealously. For the rest of the drive they forgot—and were happy.

¶

AT the door of a garage in the heart of Paris the man stopped, opened the door of the car, and called for someone to bring him a fresh bulb for the inside light. They got out and drifted along the Grand Boulevard, hand in hand, jostled by everyone, felt by none. The lights and sounds and movements exhilarated Everitt and took him out of himself; he strode on, talking and laughing, even, in a kind of desperate distraction. But she grew steadily quieter, gripped his hand nervously at the dangerous crossings, shrank against him, and even dragged her pace.

"I—I can't walk quite so fast," she said a little breathlessly. "My—my feet feel heavy and—and farther away, somehow. I—I——"

"What's the matter?" he asked anxiously stopping and staring at her. "You mustn't—I mean, is anything really—— Oh, please be careful!"

"That's just it," she answered with a faint little pathetic smile. "I thought I ought to tell you. Of course one notices everything. I may be just tired, but I feel different. It's difficult to explain, but you know, in dreams, when you lift your feet and put them down, and try so hard, but you don't get anywhere? Do you know at all what I mean?"

"I always know what you mean," he answered brusquely. "Come—come in here. Sit down, for heaven's sake! You're only tired."

He had no self-consciousness now, no terror of the crowds that filled the hall, where dancing was in full swing. He led her to an empty table, and watched her sink with relief into a chair. A worried look about her eyes, a slight droop of the mouth, had quite changed the calm, slightly amused expression that he now realized was characteristic of her.

The funny French couples trotted solidly past them.

"And they think that is a tango!" she said, and laughed. "With the *vrai jazz américain!* They haven't the least idea of syncopation; they think 'jazz' means a saxophone and a drum! How stupidly those darkies are playing!"

"They're probably half drunk," he answered carelessly, watching her closely "Here, don't get up! Where are you going?"

"I'd like to see if I can't hypnotize them into something real," she said; and he saw with delight that a sort of girlish daring had worked in her, a spirit of experiment that took, for the time being that tired worried look out of her eyes.

"Come on," he said, "let's try!"

Leading him by the hand, like a child in some just-invented game, she threaded her way among the absorbed dancers, and stepped close to the saxophone player, who, with half-closed eyes, breathed out now and then a few bell-like notes, tapping carelessly with his feet.

"Come," she said persuasively, touching his arm, "that's not the way—you know it! You can't fool us, you know. Play it right, for once! We're not French!"

The negro opened his eyes slowly, moved his arm, and stared at her. A strange bluish pallor spread over his dark face, his eyeballs rolled back in his head.

"Take it away! Take it away!" he cried, and fell back in his chair, pushing over the men behind him.

"What's come? What's come, Henry?" they babbled, and only the pianist pounded on, his back to them.

"Le' me out! le' me out!" he screamed; and four of them with shaking backward

glances tumbled out after him, the dancers crowding angily to the platform, a confused clatter of exasperated French raining like shrapnel over the crowd.

"What's the matter with them?" she asked, amazed, staring at the mêlée. "Is he crazy?"

"Ah, come on," growled a tall American, pulling the girl with him out of the crowd. "When these Frenchies get excited they're the limit!"

"But, listen; what happened?" the girl asked, dragging at his arm. "What struck him that way?"

"Oh, he's just a crazy nigger," the man answered disgustedly. "Didn't you hear him? He said he liked the French girls all right, but he wasn't going to stand for no French ghosts! I'll bet they're running now! Come on to Montmartre, Bess; it's no good here."

Everitt felt his heart pound, the veins beat in his ears.

"Come out," he said roughly. "Come out—now! It means nothing—it didn't mean——"

She slipped her hand under his arm.

"Hurry," she murmured; "hurry, please!"

They pushed by the proprietor, who was making an impassioned appeal for order, and promising another band immediately.

Once in the fresh air they walked in silence. Neither could speak. After a few minutes her pace began to lag, and dreading the look he might catch on her face he stopped in front of a lighted door.

"Here," he said, "come in here. Don't be afraid; there won't be any jazz bands here."

In the lobby of the quiet, correct hotel there were few loiterers; it was just too early for dinner and much too late for tea. They climbed a few tiled steps and came into the velvet lounge, where only a couple and a few men, scattered among the big chairs, still lingered. He led her to a large divan and established her, protesting, on it, utterly careless of the occupants of the room.

"Please be still," he begged, "and try not to think of it! If I could only bring you something."

"I don't think I want anything," she said thoughtfully. "I meant to speak about that. You see, I drink a lot of water—ordinarily—but I don't feel thirsty at all. But we certainly can feel tired, can't we? Are you hungry?"

He shook his head.

"And I hadn't had any lunch, either. I thought of that too. Do you feel better now?"

"Much better," she said gratefully. "It's only walking I seem to be so clumsy at. Isn't it pleasant and quiet here?"

"Yes. It's a good hotel. I've often stayed here. And they play really good music after dinner. I've sat here and smoked and listened to it often."

"Were you much in Paris?" she asked.

"I came first when I finished at Oxford," he said. "My uncle sent me, as a reward for having got through without being sent down, I suppose. I came with three other fellows, and we had a glorious time!"

"What did you do?"

"Well," he answered, "with a few reservations I'll tell you. First, we went to the Opéra——"

He talked on easily, delighted at her interest and at the absence of that strained, frightened look he had learned to dread. Unconsciously he lowered his voice, and they murmured to each other in a profound intimacy. She no longer held to his hand, but he noticed that when anyone moved in their direction or whenever a new face appeared in the door she reached out for him, and he caught her hand and pressed it.

She asked few questions; he rambled on among his young man's memories, back to his boyhood, came again to later years. Odd little moments he had supposed lost for ever—a flaming sunset on the Jungfrau, an unforgettable hour of Paderewski, the instant fear of death in an accident at sea, his mother's face when she gave him cherries one hot noon and he piled them in a tiny checked pinafore, the first nightingales he heard in Italy—they bubbled up from the very well of his heart, it seemed, and she listened and smiled and understood.

"And when were you happiest?" she asked.

The dining-room was full now, the orchestra was playing Pagliacci; they were alone in the lounge.

"Why, now, I think," he answered instantly; "now—at forty-one! It's odd, isn't it? One thinks that you th——"

"Now?" she asked gently. "Now?"

He stared at her and blinked. Again he was lost in her eyes; again the room swayed slightly and the heavy velvet curtains began

to push inwards, bellying like sails; the couch rocked where she lay, like a boat at sea.

"Oh! Oh!" he muttered. "What is this? What is this? What are you doing?"

"I am doing nothing," she said gravely; "it is you who are pushing me, drawing me. Look away!"

With a tremendous effort he tore his eyes away, and the music swelled again; he realized that everything had been silent before.

"Was that always playing?" he asked dully, and she shook her head.

"I don't know. I heard the water. How long do you suppose it will last? Why don't you see—the others? We aren't the only ones, surely?"

"I've been thinking that so long—I didn't dare tell you! I can't imagine why. In this big place there must be someone every minute, nearly."

"But you will stay with me?" she urged eagerly, sitting now on the divan, where he crouched beside her, so that he rose and sat by her. "You will be here, whatever happens?"

"I'll be here, whatever happens," he said, and took her hand. "I swear I'll keep where you are as long as it's humanly possible, my dear. It'll take a fight to get me away."

"Oh, don't! How do we know? This—this can't last. If it could be like this——"

"Would you wish it to be?"

"Oh, yes! Oh, yes!"

The orchestra softened and thrummed, waiting.

"Träume," she whispered. "How lovely!"

Suddenly, in the middle of the melting, trembling notes, she spoke.

"Are you religious?" she asked. "What do you believe?"

"I don't know," he answered. "I'm not at all religious, though—are you?"

"No."

"I've been up to the average," he went on slowly. "Lord knows it's not much! But I never cheated, nor went back on anybody, and I don't lie—unless I have to! Oh, I mean, not that sort of lie!"

"I know. It's like that with me, too. So we're alike."

"Lord, no we're not! Don't get that idea—not for a minute, my dear! Men—men——".

"Oh, I suppose so," she said wearily. "I suppose so. Do you think that will make a difference?"

"I don't know," he said briefly.

They sat in a long silence.

"Do you know," she said suddenly, "even if I wanted to get up I couldn't? Not alone, anyway. My feet are too heavy." He stared at her, horrified, but her face was calm. "It's no good fighting it," she said. "Only, stay here, will you?"

He shut his lips till the teeth cut them.

"I'll stay," he said.

A middle-aged maid, leading a wire-haired terrier, came through the lounge and walked down to them. The dog checked suddenly, stared at Everitt, drew back on his haunches, and uttered a wild groaning howl. The hair stood stiff on his small, stocky body; his jaws opened.

"*Tais-toi, tais-toi!*" the man cried, but he howled again and stiffened.

She dragged at him, but he dug his nails into the velvet and raised again that melancholy, searching cry. Everitt threatened him wildly, but he did not move.

"One would say," said the maid angrily, in rapid French, "that the poor beast scented the death! And, why not? His mistress is sickly enough. Come on, thou!"

Two footmen rushed out and seized the dog, scolding.

"Wilt thou drive every accursed American from the hotel with thy imbecile brute? Up! Up!" they stormed, and the stronger of them seized the rigid animal and hurried out with it, the woman running angrily after, holding the leash. The maître d'hôtel dashed into the lounge, cursing; someone called from behind the desk:

"Command that the orchestra play immediately the jazz *américain*—fools! Pigs!"

Everitt leaned over her; she was ashy white.

"Water! Water!" he whispered. "It helped you before! I'll be back in a second!"

She met his eyes, but this time with no danger in her own. Her look was so deep, so speaking, that with a sobbing word caught in his throat he leaned over her and kissed her desperately, closely.

"Oh, stay! stay!" he whispered against her mouth. "Try to stay!"

He felt her lips grow cold under his, and muttering and cursing he tore himself

away and rushed to a carafe that stood on a little table halfway across the room. He seized the bottle, but to his horror, though his hand closed around it, it remained on the table. It was like taking hold of a carafe in a mirror.

"And yet I brought her water in my cap!" He wondered stupidly. "I slopped it all over her!"

Turning, he hurried back. The divan was empty. With a grunt of rage he passed his hand over it; it was still warm, where she had been sitting.

"She was frightened—she ran out!" he muttered, and dashed after her, out of the door, but he knew he should not see her. She had gone. He was utterly and entirely alone.

¶

CURSING, praying, calling her, he tore through the streets, alone in the crowded boulevards, jostling unconscious pedestrians, pushing carelessly against the screaming motors. And as he dashed along he became aware that his progress was growing more difficult, his feet moved more slowly. He seemed to lift them up as out of wet sand and each motion required a distinct effort of the will.

"Ah!" he muttered. "That's what she meant then! That's it, is it? We'll see, we'll see! They shan't get me that way—I'll fool them!"

And even in that minute something in him marvelled.

"It's 'them' is it—not 'he'? Do we always go back to that? Were the old peoples right, after all?"

Furiously, determinedly, fighting for each long clumsy stride, he pushed his way to what he wanted.

"That bridge with the gold statues—what do they call it?" he muttered. "Ah, there it is!"

He shouldered rudely into a priest, unconsciously stepping in his way.

"A lot you know about it!" he cried bitterly. "You can't even see me."

For the thin lips moved constantly, the mild pale eyes gazed through his blankly.

"Bah!" he cried, and seizing the stone balustrade he dragged himself painfully to the top; he could hardly pull his feet after him.

"Now we'll see what happens!" he muttered. "Oh, why did you leave me? Why did you go first?"

The lights rippled over the water; the Seine flowed full and quiet below him; he raised his hands and jumped, and something in his brain blew out as a candle flame blows out in the wind. He knew nothing.

Later—it might have been years or seconds—he felt great burning pain; an anguish of revolt against unbearable nausea; a smothered oblivion.

This trinity of misery repeated itself indefinitely; there was no escape from it, no relief after it.

"It's not dying then, that's hard; it's what comes after!" he thought. "Why can't it be simpler—quicker? We aren't worth all this."

He opened his eyes surprisingly, and met two bright brown eyes that smiled into his.

"That's better, Mr. Everitt!" said somebody. "Can you take this, please? That's fine!"

Something cool slipped into his mouth; he swallowed.

"You see me, then? You know who I am?"

"Why, of course, Mr. Everitt. Have you much pain? I'm the nurse. You are in the hospital. How does your head feel?"

"Then I didn't die?"

"No, indeed; you were in an accident, you know."

"Was Elsie——"

"Oh, no, Mr. Everitt; she was better off than you, really. She broke her leg; it's in a cast now, but she'll soon be out of that."

"When did I——"

"It was three weeks ago, Mr. Everitt. Mrs. George Everitt has sent every day to find out about you. Mr. Everitt will probably look in this afternoon. Perhaps you'll take a little nap now?"

The details interested him very little. When in the early days of his rapid recovery he elicited from the nurse the confessed amazement and incredulity of the doctors at the resuscitation, after eight hours, of a man officially pronounced dead, he became almost disappointingly silent. The application of electricity, at the instance of an interested specialist; the operation, extraordinarily slight, which removed the splinter of bone pressing on the brain; the painful flutterings and vacillations with which the mysterious force that we call life exhibited itself in a body that seemed unwilling to be

possessed by it—all this received his merely tolerant attention.

" You see, I was dead," he said quietly.

And when the nurse shrugged and answered, " Evidently you weren't, Mr. Everitt, for here you are ! " he only smiled obstinately and looked at her oddly.

From the day he sat up he pored over the newspapers of that date since when his life could never go on in the same careless empty way ; but there was no smallest mention of the event he searched for. As soon as he could get out he began a systematic round of the hospitals, scoured the country for miles around the cross-roads where he had met her, made his way into a dozen farmhouses and villas, but with no success.

" And I don't even know her name ! " he groaned. " Nor where she came from ! "

Paris grew hot, his sister-in-law left, surprised at his obstinacy, but anxious, as they all were, to humour him, and relieved that he spent so much of his time in the open air at least, though regretting that what they described to one another as a morbid interest kept him haunting the scene of his accident.

Alternately possessed by hope and despair, he clung to the idea that the same strange fate had mastered both of them ; that she, of all the toll of that day's dead, had not died, and that they had wandered through that mysterious borderland together.

And deep in the bottom of his heart something tolled like a bell, though he tried to shut his ears to it : " She doesn't know ! She isn't here to know ! She would tell me if she could—but she can't ! "

He would go to sleep at night hugging the thought. " But perhaps she has forgotten. Perhaps it wasn't like what it was with me ! Perhaps she doesn't know ! "

And in the morning he would wake to the tolling of that cruel little bell. " She isn't here to know ! "

His sister settled in England. He moved to the hotel where he had taken her, and sat, a lonely figure, every night, on the great divan where she had lain. Once, when the orchestra played Pagliacci, a quick hot smarting closed his eyes suddenly, and he clenched his hands, hearing her voice :

" Were you much in Paris ? "

He knew, then, that he was thinking of her as we think of the dead, and groaned aloud.

" I wish I had gone, too ! " he muttered.

He spent the next days in hunting out the convent near Chartres, where she had gone to school, and found it at last, no longer under the sisters, but kept by an angular Englishwoman for the benefit of English girls. Nothing had altered, thanks to the immutable French fashions, and the dark old kitchen where Sœur Ambroisine had ruled still glowed with orange coppers, the marigolds flamed in the court. Even an old tawny sheep dog dozed near the well ; perhaps the lineal descendant of Amidor.

It pleased him enormously, this pilgrimage, and he promised himself a return. If only she had told him more of her past, so that he could have re-lived it !

He dressed for dinner and slipped into his pocket the ticket for a César Franck concert that night ; an eminent violinist was playing the Sonata, and he knew in advance the painful sweetness in store for him, and that he would live over again that hour and a half in the close dimness of the motor, with her hand in his.

" I know that men have been this way before," he told himself, " but they hadn't my excuse, they hadn't my excuse ! "

He took his seat at his accustomed table in the corner and, having ordered his dinner, looked carefully around the room. This had become automatic with him, ever since he came to the hotel. He had told himself then that if she were alive, and in Paris, and remembered, she would come there.

And in the opposite corner, suddenly, there she was. Lovelier than he had remembered, perhaps because her low-cut evening dress framed white shoulders he had never seen, and paler, which threw out the reddish lights in her hair ; she seemed more slender in her black velvet than she had appeared in the tan silk coat. His heart stopped a beat, then pounded heavily, and he half-turned in his chair and opened a newspaper.

She sat between an elderly woman and a good-looking, square-chinned man who watched her with obvious interest ; she herself looked at nobody, but studied the menu.

Everitt called the maître d'hôtel and took out a bank-note.

" Who is the young lady in the corner, Ernest, in black ? " he inquired, blessing the Paris that found all such queries natural and worthy. The man departed, and soon returned.

"It is Miss Sylvia Reetch, monsieur. Mademoiselle her aunt and Mr. George MacAlistairre accompany her. They arrived this morning only. Mademoiselle and the aunt occupy Suite B, *au quatrième*. Monsieur does not rest in the hotel. Thank you very much, monsieur."

"Sylvia Ritch," he repeated softly.

He ate mechanically and wondered at the flatness of the wine, only to find at the end of the meal that he had been drinking mineral water. When her party rose he rose with them, and followed discreetly to the lounge, where they drank their coffee. He took a table behind where she sat, to hear her voice; it fell a little more to the contralto, he decided. She spoke little.

"But I hate to leave you, Sylvia," said her aunt doubtfully. "It seems so horrid to let you go off to that stupid concert alone. Let me go to the theatre by myself, and let George take you!"

"Please, aunty," she said, very low, "I have told you that I prefer to go alone. George doesn't care for César Franck."

"But I'd love to go with you," said the man wistfully; "or I could take Miss Ritch and come back for you."

"I want to go alone," she said wearily. "Can't you understand? I shall be all right. It's because I want to go alone!"

Everitt could have touched her with his hand.

"Then I suppose we had better be starting," said Mr. MacAllister. "You don't leave till nine, Sylvia?"

"At nine," she said. "I'll sit here awhile."

They rose and left her, and she folded her hands in her lap and closed her eyes.

The orchestra, after a soft thrumming, began to play Wagner's Träume; he stared at her, too weak to move or speak.

From under her closed eyelids slow tears began to roll; she wiped them away, but they rose and rose, and brimmed till with a despairing little gesture she left her seat and hurried towards the lift.

"If they have a suite," he thought, "they have a sitting-room," and taking a card from his pocket he wrote on it: "Why did you wait so long? You can't have forgotten. I've been waiting here for you. May I see you?"

It seemed hardly a moment before the page came back.

"Will monsieur mount?" he said. "Madame attends him."

She stood in the gay little room, black and pale and slender against the flowers and curtains.

"You? You?" she whispered. And then, holding his hands, her eyes wide: "But you—the paper said—I thought——"

"Where were you?" he said, trembling "Why did you make me think—— Oh, wherever were you?"

"I was in England," she murmured, her eyes lost in his. "They took me there. I—I was supposed to have died, you know. I couldn't stay any longer. Oh, why didn't you let me know? It was cruel!"

"I didn't know your name," he said, staring at the lovely rose that flooded her cheeks, the tiny powdered freckles on her chin, the deep light in her grey eyes. "My dear, I didn't know your name! I could only stay here. I knew, if you were alive, you would come."

"Oh, I am alive!" she cried softly. "I am alive, my dear! And I came—I came!"

"The Futility of Fashionable Life"

An Arresting Article by ROSITA FORBES

Appears in the JANUARY number of

Cassell's Magazine of Fiction

BRILLIANT STORIES **1/-** *FASCINATING ARTICLES*

NOW ON SALE

The New Jersey Sphinx

Of a well-made scheme that went astray

By R. AUSTIN FREEMAN

"A RATHER curious neighbourhood this, Jervis," my friend Thorndyke remarked as we turned into Upper Bedford Place; "a sort of temporary aviary for cosmopolitan birds of passage, especially those of the Oriental variety. The Asiatic and African faces that one sees at the windows of these Bloomsbury boarding-houses almost suggest an overflow from the ethnographical galleries of the adjacent British Museum."

"Yes," I agreed, "there must be quite a considerable population of Africans, Japanese and Hindus in Bloomsbury; particularly Hindus."

As I spoke, and as if in illustration of my statement, a dark-skinned man rushed out of one of the houses farther down the street and began to advance towards us in a rapid, bewildered fashion, stopping to look at each street door as he came to it. His hatless condition—though he was exceedingly well dressed—and his agitated manner immediately attracted my attention, and Thorndyke's, too, for the latter remarked, "Our friend seems to be in trouble. An accident, perhaps, or a case of sudden illness."

Here the stranger, observing our approach, ran forward to meet us and asked in an agitated tone, "Can you tell me, please, where I can find a doctor?"

"I am a medical man," replied Thorndyke, "and so is my friend."

Our acquaintance grasped Thorndyke's sleeve and exclaimed eagerly:

"Come with me, then, quickly if you please. A most dreadful thing has happened."

He hurried us along at something between a trot and a quick walk, and as we proceeded he continued excitedly, "I am quite confused and terrified; it is all so strange and sudden and terrible."

"Try," said Thorndyke, "to calm yourself a little and tell us what has happened."

"I will," was the agitated reply. "It is my cousin, Dinanath Byramji—his surname is the same as mine. Just now I went to his room and was horrified to find him lying on the floor, staring at the ceiling and blowing—like this," and he puffed out his cheeks with a soft blowing noise. "I spoke to him and shook his hand, but he was like a dead man. This is the house."

He darted up the steps to an open door at which a rather scared page-boy was on guard, and running along the hall, rapidly ascended the stairs. Following him closely, we reached a rather dark first-floor landing where, at a half-open door, a servant-maid stood listening with an expression of awe to a rhythmical snoring sound that issued from the room.

The unconscious man lay as Mr. Byramji had said, staring fixedly at the ceiling with wide-open glazy eyes, puffing out his cheeks slightly at each breath. But the breathing was shallow and slow, and it grew perceptibly slower, with lengthening pauses. And even as I was timing it with my watch while Thorndyke examined the pupils with the aid of a wax match, it stopped. I laid my finger on the wrist and caught one or two slow, flickering beats. Then the pulse stopped, too.

"He is gone," said I. "He must have burst one of the large arteries."

"Apparently," said Thorndyke, "though one would not have expected it at his age. But wait! What is this?"

He pointed to the right ear, in the hollow of which a few drops of blood had collected, and as he spoke he drew his hand gently over the dead man's head and moved it slightly from side to side.

"There is a fracture of the base of the skull," said he, "and quite distinct signs of contusion of the scalp." He turned to Mr. Byramji, who stood wringing his hands and gazing incredulously at the dead man, and asked:

"Can you throw any light on this?"

The Indian looked at him vacantly. The sudden tragedy seemed to have paralysed his brain. "I don't understand," said he. "What does it mean?"

"It means," replied Thorndyke, "that he has received a heavy blow on the head."

For a few moments Mr. Byramji continued to stare vacantly at my colleague. Then he seemed suddenly to realise the import of Thorndyke's reply, for he started up excitedly and turned to the door, outside which the two servants were hovering.

"Where is the person gone who came in with my cousin?" he demanded.

"You saw him go out, Albert," said the maid. "Tell Mr. Byramji where he went to."

The page tiptoed into the room with a fearful eye fixed on the corpse, and replied falteringly, "I only see the back of him as he went out, and all I know is that he turned to the left. P'raps he's gone for a doctor."

"Can you give us any description of him?" asked Thorndyke.

"I only see the back of him," repeated the page. "He was a shortish gentleman and he had on a dark suit of clothes and a bowler. That's all I know."

"Thank you," said Thorndyke. "We may want to ask you some more questions presently," and having conducted the page to the door, he shut it and turned to Mr. Byramji.

"Have you any idea who it was that was with your cousin?" he asked.

"None at all," was the reply. "I was sitting in my room opposite, writing, when I heard my cousin come up the stairs with another person, to whom he was talking. I could not hear what he was saying. They went into his room—this room—and I could occasionally catch the sound of their voices. In about a quarter of an hour I heard the door open and shut, and then some one went downstairs, softly and rather quickly. I finished the letter that I was writing, and when I had addressed it I came in here to ask my cousin who the visitor was. I thought it might be some one who had come to negotiate for the ruby."

"The ruby!" exclaimed Thorndyke. "What ruby do you refer to?"

"The great ruby," replied Byramji. "But of course you have not——" He broke off suddenly and stood for a few moments staring at Thorndyke with parted lips and wide-open eyes; then abruptly he turned, and kneeling beside the dead man he began, in a curious, caressing, half-apologetic manner, first to pass his hand gently over the body at the waist and then to unfasten the clothes. This brought into view a handsome, soft leather belt, evidently of native workmanship, worn next to the skin and furnished with three pockets. Mr. Byramji unbuttoned and explored them in quick succession, and it was evident that they were all empty.

"It is gone!" he exclaimed in low, intense tones. "Gone! Ah! But how little would it signify! But thou, dear Dinanath, my brother, my friend, thou art gone, too!"

He lifted the dead man's hand and pressed it to his cheek, murmuring endearments in his own tongue. Presently he laid it down reverently, and sprang up, and I was startled at the change in his aspect. The delicate, gentle, refined face had suddenly become fierce, sinister, vindictive.

"This wretch must die!" he exclaimed huskily. "This sordid brute who, without compunction, has crushed out a precious life as one would carelessly crush a fly, for the sake of a paltry crystal—he must die, if I have to follow him and strangle him with my own hands!"

Thorndyke laid his hand on Byramji's shoulder. "I sympathise with you most cordially," said he. "If it is as you think, and appearances suggest, that your cousin has been murdered as a mere incident of robbery, the murderer's life is forfeit, and Justice cries aloud for retribution. The fact of murder will be determined, for or against, by a proper inquiry. Meanwhile we have to ascertain who this unknown man is and what happened while he was with your cousin."

Byramji made a gesture of despair. "But the man has disappeared, and nobody has seen him! What can we do?"

"Let us look around us," replied Thorndyke, "and see if we can judge what has happened in this room. What, for instance, is this?"

He picked up from a corner near the door a small leather object, which he handed to Mr. Byramji. The Indian seized it eagerly, exclaiming:

"Ah! It is the little bag in which my cousin used to carry the ruby. So he had taken it from his belt."

"It hasn't been dropped, by any chance?" I suggested.

In an instant Mr. Byramji was down on

his knees, peering and groping about the floor, and Thorndyke and I joined in the search. But, as might have been expected, there was no sign of the ruby, nor, indeed, of anything else, excepting a hat which I picked up from under the table.

"No," said Mr. Byramji, rising with a dejected air. "It is gone—of course it is gone, and the murderous villain——"

Here his glance fell on the hat, which I had laid on the table, and he bent forward to look at it.

"Whose hat is this?" he demanded, glancing at the chair on which Thorndyke's hat and mine had been placed.

"Is it not your cousin's?" asked Thorndyke.

"No, certainly not. His hat was like mine—we bought them both together. It had a white silk lining with his initials, D.B., in gold. This has no lining and is a much older hat. It must be the murderer's hat."

"If it is," said Thorndyke, "that is a most important fact—important in two respects. Could you let us see your hat?"

"Certainly," replied Byramji, walking quickly, but with a soft tread, to the door. As he went out, shutting the door silently behind him, Thorndyke picked up the derelict hat and swiftly tried it on the head of the dead man. As far as I could judge, it appeared to fit, and this Thorndyke confirmed as he replaced it on the table.

"As you see," said he, "it is at least a practicable fit, which is a fact of some significance."

Here Mr. Byramji returned with his own hat, which he placed on the table by the side of the other, and thus placed, crown uppermost, the two hats were closely similar. Both were black, hard felts of the prevalent "bowler" shape, and of good quality, and the difference in their age and state of preservation was not striking; but when Byramji turned them over and exhibited their interiors it was seen that whereas the strange hat was unlined save for the leather head-band, Byramji's had a white silk lining and bore the owner's initials in embossed gilt letters.

"What happened," said Thorndyke, when he had carefully compared the two hats, "seems fairly obvious. The two men, on entering, placed their hats crown upwards on the table. In some way—perhaps during a struggle—the visitor's hat was knocked down and rolled under the table. Then the stranger, on leaving, picked up the only visible hat—almost identically similar to his own—and put it on."

"Is it not rather singular," I asked, "that he should not have noticed the different feel of a strange hat?"

"I think not," Thorndyke replied. "If he noticed anything unusual he would probably assume that he had put it on the wrong way round. Remember that he would be extremely hurried and agitated. And when once he had left the house he would not dare to take the risk of returning, though he would doubtless realise the gravity of the mistake. And now," he continued, "would you mind giving us a few particulars? You have spoken of a great ruby which your cousin had, and which seems to be missing."

"Yes. You shall come to my room and I will tell you about it; but first let us lay my poor cousin decently on his bed."

"I think," said Thorndyke, "the body ought not to be removed until the police have seen it."

"Perhaps you are right," Byramji agreed reluctantly, "though it seems callous to leave him lying there." With a sigh he turned to the door, and Thorndyke followed, carrying the two hats.

¶

"MY cousin and I," said our host, when we were seated in his own large bed-sitting room, "were both interested in gem-stones. I deal in all kinds of stones that are found in the East, but Dinanath dealt almost exclusively in rubies. He was a very fine judge of those beautiful gems, and he used to make periodical tours in Burma in search of uncut rubies of unusual size or quality. About four months ago he acquired at Mogok, in Upper Burma, a magnificent specimen over twenty-eight carats in weight, perfectly flawless and of the most gorgeous colour. It had been roughly cut, but my cousin was intending to have it recut unless he should receive an advantageous offer for it in the meantime."

"What would be the value of such a stone?" I asked.

"It is impossible to say. A really fine large ruby of perfect colour is far, far more valuable than the finest diamond of the same size. It is the most precious of all gems, with the possible exception of the emerald. A fine ruby of five carats is worth about

three thousand pounds, but of course, the value rises out of all proportion with increasing size Fifty thousand pounds would be a moderate prize for Dinanath's ruby."

During this recital I noticed that Thorndyke, while listening attentively, was turning the stranger's hat over in his hands, narrowly scrutinising it both inside and outside. As Byramji concluded, he remarked:

"We shall have to let the police know what has happened, but, as my friend and I will be called as witnesses, I should like to examine this hat a little more closely before you hand it over to them. Could you let me have a small, hard brush? A dry nail-brush would do."

Our host complied readily—in fact eagerly. Thorndyke's authoritative, purposeful manner had clearly impressed him, for he said as he handed my colleague a new nail-brush: "I thank you for your help and value it. We must not depend on the police only."

Accustomed as I was to Thorndyke's methods, his procedure was not unexpected, but Mr. Byramji watched him with breathless interest and no little surprise as, laying a sheet of notepaper on the table, he brought the hat close to it and brushed firmly but slowly, so that the dust dislodged should fall on it. As it was not a very well-kept hat, the yield was considerable, especially when the brush was drawn under the curl of the brim, and very soon the paper held quite a little heap. Then Thorndyke folded the paper into a small packet and having written "outside" on it, put it in his pocket-book.

"Why do you do that?" Mr. Byramji asked. "What will the dust tell you?"

"Probably nothing," Thorndyke replied. "But this hat is our only direct clue to the identity of the man who was with your cousin, and we must make the most of it. Dust, you know, is only a mass of fragments detached from surrounding objects. If the objects are unusual the dust may be quite distinctive. You could easily identify the hat of a miller or a cement worker." As he was speaking he reversed the hat and turned down the leather head-lining, whereupon a number of strips of folded paper fell down into the crown.

"Ah!" exclaimed Byramji, "perhaps we shall learn something now."

He picked out the folded slips and began eagerly to open them out, and we examined them systematically, one by one. But they were singularly disappointing and uninforming. Mostly they consisted of strips of newspaper, with one or two circulars, a leaf from a price list of gas stoves, a portion of a large envelope on which were the remains of an address which read '—n—don, W.C.," and a piece of paper, evidently cut down vertically and bearing the right-hand half of some kind of list. This read:

'—el 3 oz. 5 dwts.
—eep 9½ oz."

"Can you make anything of this?" I asked, handing the paper to Thorndyke.

He looked at it reflectively, and answered, as he copied it into his notebook: "It has, at least, some character. If we consider it with the other data we should get some sort of hint from it. But these scraps of paper don't tell us much. Perhaps their most suggestive feature is their quantity and the way in which, as you have no doubt noticed, they were arranged at the sides of the hat. We had better replace them as we found them for the benefit of the police."

The nature of the suggestion to which he referred was not very obvious to me, but the presence of Mr. Byramji rendered discussion inadvisable; nor was there any opportunity, for we had hardly reconstituted the hat when we became aware of a number of persons ascending the stairs.

Mr. Byramji opened the door and went out on to the landing, where several persons had collected, including the two servants and a constable.

"I understand," said the policeman, "that there is something wrong here.

"A very terrible thing has happened," replied Byramji. "But the doctors can tell you better than I can." Here he looked appealingly at Thorndyke, and we both went out and joined him.

"A gentleman—Mr. Dinanath Byramji—has met with his death under somewhat suspicious circumstances," said Thorndyke, and, glancing at the knot of naturally curious persons on the landing, he continued: "If you will come into the room where the death occurred, I will give you the facts so far as they are known to us."

With this he opened the door and entered the room with Mr. Byramji, the constable, and me. As the door opened, a middle-aged woman uttered a cry of horror and followed us into the room.

"This is dreadful!" she exclaimed, with a shuddering glance at the corpse. "The servants told me about it when I came in just now and I sent Albert for the police at once. But what does it mean?"

"We had better get the facts, ma'am," said the constable, drawing out a large black note-book and laying his helmet on the table. He turned to Mr. Byramji, who had sunk into a chair and sat, the picture of grief, gazing at his dead cousin. "Would you kindly tell me what you know about how it happened?"

Byramji repeated the substance of what he had told us, and when the constable had taken down his statement, Thorndyke and I gave the few medical particulars that we could furnish and handed the constable our cards. Then, having helped to lay the corpse on the bed and cover it with a sheet, we turned to take our leave.

"You have been very kind," Mr. Byramji said as he shook our hands warmly. "I am more than grateful. Perhaps I may be permitted to call on you and hear if—if you have learned anything fresh" he concluded discreetly.

"We shall be pleased to see you," Thorndyke replied, "and to give you any help that we can"; and with this we took our departure, watched inquisitively down the stairs by the boarders and the servants.

"If the police have no more information than we have," I remarked as we walked homeward, "they won't have much to go on."

"No," said Thorndyke. "But you must remember that this crime—as we are justified in assuming it to be—is not an isolated one. It is the fourth of practically the same kind within the last six months. I understand that the police have some kind of information respecting the presumed criminal, though it can't be worth much, seeing that no arrest has been made. But there is some new evidence this time. The exchange of hats may help the police considerably."

"In what way? What evidence does it furnish?"

"In the first place it suggests a hurried departure, which seems to connect the missing man with the crime. Then, he is wearing the dead man's hat, and though he is not likely to continue wearing it, it may be seen and furnish a clue. We know that that hat fits him fairly and we know its size, so that we know the size of his head. Finally, we have the man's own hat."

"I don't fancy the police will get much information from that," said I.

"Probably not," he agreed. "Yet it offered one or two interesting suggestions, as you probably observed."

"It made no suggestions whatever to me," said I.

"Then," said Thorndyke, "I can only recommend you to recall our simple inspection and consider the significance of what we found."

This I had to accept as closing the discussion for the time being, and as I had to make a call at my bookseller's concerning some reports that I had left to be bound, I parted from Thorndyke at the corner of Chichester Rents.

My business with the bookseller took me longer than I had expected, and when I arrived at our chambers in King's Bench Walk, I found Thorndyke apparently at the final stage of some experiment evidently connected with our late adventure. The microscope stood on the table with one slide on the stage and a second one beside it; but Thorndyke had apparently finished his microscopical researches, for as I entered he held in his hand a test-tube filled with a smoky-coloured fluid.

"I see that you have been examining the dust from the hat," said I. "Does it throw any fresh light on the case?"

"Very little," he replied. "It is just common dust—assorted fibres and miscellaneous organic and mineral particles. But there are a couple of hairs from the inside of the hat—both lightish brown, and one of the atrophic, note-of-exclamation type that one finds at the margin of bald patches; and the outside dust shows minute traces of lead, apparently in the form of oxide. What do you make of that?"

"Perhaps the man is a plumber or a painter," I suggested.

"Either is possible and worth considering," he replied; but his tone made clear to me that this was not his own inference; and a row of five consecutive Post Office Directories, which I had already noticed ranged along the end of the table, told me that he had not only formed an hypothesis on the subject, but had probably either confirmed or disproved it. For the Post Office Directory was one of Thorndyke's favourite books of reference; and the amount of curious information that he

succeeded in extracting from its matter-of-fact pages would have surprised no one more than it would the compilers of the work.

At this moment the sound of footsteps ascending our stairs became audible. It was late for business callers, but we were not unaccustomed to late visitors; and a familiar rat-tat of our little brass knocker seemed to explain the untimely visit.

"That sounds like Superintendent Miller's knock," said Thorndyke, as he strode across the room to open the door. And the Superintendent it turned out to be. But not alone.

As the door opened the officer entered with two gentlemen, both natives of India, and one of whom was our friend Mr. Byramji.

"Perhaps," said Miller, "I had better look in a little later."

"Not on my account," said Byramji. "I have only a few words to say and there is nothing secret about my business. May I introduce my kinsman, Mr. Khambata, a student of the Inner Temple?"

Byramji's companion bowed ceremoniously. "Byramji came to my chambers just now," he explained, "to consult me about this dreadful affair, and he chanced to show me your card. He had not heard of you, but supposed you to be an ordinary medical practitioner. But I, who knew of your great reputation, advised him to put his affairs in your hands—without prejudice to the official investigations," Mr. Khambata added hastily, bowing to the Superintendent.

"And I," said Mr. Byramji, "instantly decided to act on my kinsman's advice. I have come to beg you to leave no stone unturned to secure the punishment of my cousin's murderer. Spare no expense. I am a rich man. As to the ruby, recover it if you can, but it is of no consequence. Vengeance—justice is what I seek. Deliver this wretch into the hands of justice, and I give you the ruby freely—gladly."

"There is no need," said Thorndyke, "of such extraordinary inducement. If you wish me to investigate this case, I will do so and will use every means at my disposal, without prejudice, as your friend says, to the proper claims of the officers of the law. But you understand that I can make no promises."

"We understand that," said Mr. Khambata. "But we know that if you undertake the case, everything that is possible will be done. And now we must leave you to your consultation."

As soon as our clients had gone, Miller rose from his chair with his hand in his breast pocket. "I dare say, doctor," said he, "you can guess what I have come about. I was sent for to look into this Byramji case, and I heard from Mr. Byramji that you had been there and that you had made a minute examination of the missing man's hat. So have I; and I don't mind telling you that I could learn nothing from it."

"I haven't learnt much myself," said Thorndyke.

"But you've picked up something," urged Miller, "if it is only a hint; and we have just a little clue. There is very small doubt that this is the same man—'The New Jersey Sphinx,' as the papers call him—that committed those other robberies; and a very difficult type of criminal he is to get hold of. He is bold, he is wary, he plays a lone hand, and he sticks at nothing. He has no confederates, and he kills every time. The American police never got near him but once; and that once gives us the only clues we have."

"Finger-prints?" inquired Thorndyke.

"Yes, and very poor ones, too. So rough that you can hardly make out the pattern. And even those are not absolutely guaranteed to be his; but in any case, finger-prints are not much use until you've got the man. And there is a photograph of the fellow himself. But it is only a snapshot, and a poor one at that. All it shows is that he has a mop of hair and a pointed beard—or at least he had when the photograph was taken. But for identification purposes it is practically worthless. Still, there it is; and what I propose is this: we've worked together before and can trust one another. I am going to lay my cards on the table and ask you to do the same."

"But, my dear Miller," said Thorndyke, "I haven't a single solid fact."

The detective was visibly disappointed. Nevertheless, he laid two photographs on the table and pushed them towards Thorndyke, who inspected them through his lens and passed them to me.

"The pattern is very indistinct and broken up," he remarked.

"Yes," said Miller; "the prints must have been made on a very rough surface, though you get prints something like those from fitters or other men who use files and

handle rough metal. And now, doctor, can't you give us a lead of any kind?"

Thorndyke reflected a few moments. "I really have not a single real fact," said he, "and I am unwilling to make merely speculative suggestions."

"Oh, that's all right," Miller replied cheerfully. "Give us a start. I shan't complain if it comes to nothing"

"Well," Thorndyke said reluctantly, "I was thinking of getting a few particulars as to the various tenants of No. 51 Clifford's Inn. Perhaps you could do it more easily and it might be worth your while."

"Good!" Miller exclaimed gleefully. "But why shouldn't we go together? It's too late to-night, and I can't manage to-morrow morning. But say to-morrow afternoon. Two heads are better than one, you know, especially when the second one is yours. Or perhaps," he added, with a glance at me, "three would be better still."

Thorndyke considered for a moment or two and then looked at me.

"What do you say, Jervis?" he asked.

As my afternoon was unoccupied, I agreed with enthusiasm, being as curious as the Superintendent to know how Thorndyke had connected this particular locality with the vanished criminal.

¶

FOR some time after the Superintendent's departure I sat wrapped in profound meditation. In some mysterious way the address, 51 Clifford's Inn, had emerged from the formless data yielded by the derelict hat. But what had been the connection? Apparently the fragment of the addressed envelope had furnished the clue. But how had Thorndyke extended "——n" into "51 Clifford's Inn"? It was to me a complete mystery.

Meanwhile, Thorndyke had seated himself at the writing-table, and I noticed that of the two letters which he wrote, one was written on our headed paper and the other on ordinary plain note-paper. I was speculating on the reason for this when he rose, and as he stuck on the stamps, said to me, "I am just going out to post these two letters. Do you care for a short stroll through the leafy shades of Fleet Street?"

"The rural solitudes of Fleet Street attract me at all hours," I replied, fetching my hat from the adjoining office, and we accordingly sallied forth together, strolling up King's Bench Walk and emerging into Fleet Street by way of Mitre Court. When Thorndyke had dropped his letters into the post office box he stood awhile gazing up at the tower of St. Dunstan's Church.

"Have you ever been in Clifford's Inn, Jervis?" he inquired.

"Never," I replied (we passed through it together on an average a dozen times a week), "but it is not too late for an exploratory visit."

We crossed the road, and entering Clifford's Inn Passage, passed through the still half-open gate, crossed the outer court and threaded the tunnel-like entry by the hall to the inner court, near the middle of which Thorndyke halted, and looking up at one of the houses, remarked, "No. 51."

"So that is where our friend hangs out his flag," said I.

"Oh come, Jervis," he protested, "I am surprised at you; you are as bad as Miller. I have merely suggested a possible connection between these premises and the hat that was left at Bedford Place. As to the nature of that connection I have no idea, and there may be no connection at all. I assure you, Jervis, that I am on the thinnest possible ice. I should not have given Miller a hint, but that he was so eager and so willing to help—and also that I wanted his finger-prints. But we are really only at the beginning, and may never get any farther."

I looked up at the old house. It was all in darkness excepting the top floor, where a couple of lighted windows showed the shadow of a man moving rapidly about the room. We crossed to the entry and inspected the names painted on the door-posts. The ground floor was occupied by a firm of photo-engravers, the first floor by a Mr. Carrington, whose name stood out conspicuously on its oblong of comparatively fresh white paint, while the tenants of the second floor—old residents, to judge by the faded and discoloured paint in which their names were announced—were Messrs. Burt & Highley, metallurgists.

"Burt has departed," said Thorndyke, as I read out the names; and he pointed to two red lines of erasure which I had not noticed in the dim light, "so the active gentleman above is presumably Mr. Highley, and we may take it that he has residential as well as business premises. I wonder who and what Mr. Carrington is—but I dare say we shall find out to-morrow."

On the following morning we bustled

through our work in order to leave the afternoon free, making several joint visits to solicitors. Returning from the last of these—a City lawyer—Thorndyke turned into St. Helen's Place and halted at a doorway bearing the brass plate of a firm of assayists and refiners. I followed him into the outer office where, on his mentioning his name, an elderly man came to the counter.

"Mr. Grayson has put out some specimens for you, sir," said he. "They are about thirty grains to the ton—you said that the content was of no importance—and I am to tell you that you need not return them. They are not worth treating." He went to a large safe from which he took a canvas bag, and returning to the counter, turned out on it the contents of the bag, consisting of about a dozen good-sized lumps of quartz and a glittering yellow fragment, which Thorndyke picked out and dropped in his pocket.

"Will that collection do?" our friend inquired.

"It will answer my purpose perfectly," Thorndyke replied, and when the specimens had been replaced in the bag, and the latter deposited in Thorndyke's hand-bag, my colleague thanked the assistant and we went on our way.

"We extend our activities into the domain of mineralogy," I remarked.

Thorndyke smiled an inscrutable smile. "We also employ the suction pump as an instrument of research," he observed. "However, the strategic uses of chunks of quartz—otherwise than as missiles—will develop themselves in due course."

It was. But my reflections brought no solution. I noticed, however, that when at three o'clock we set forth in company with the Superintendent, the bag went with us; and having offered to carry it and having had my offer accepted with a sly twinkle, its weight assured me that the quartz was still inside.

"Chambers and Offices to let," Thorndyke read aloud as we approached the porter's lodge. "That lets us in, I think. And the porter knows Dr. Jervis and me by sight, so he will talk more freely."

"He doesn't know me," said the Superintendent, "but I'll keep in the background, all the same."

A pull at the bell brought out a clerical-looking man in a tall hat and a frock coat, who regarded us through his spectacles with an amiable air of recognition.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Larkin," said Thorndyke. "I am asked to get particulars of vacant chambers. What have you got to let?"

Mr. Larkin reflected. "Let me see. There's a ground floor at No. 5—rather dark—and a small second-pair set at No. 12. And then there is—oh, yes, there is a good first floor set at No. 51. They wouldn't have been vacant until Michaelmas, but Mr. Carrington, the tenant, has had to go abroad suddenly. I had a letter from him this morning, enclosing the key. Funny letter, too." He dived into his pocket, and hauling out a bundle of letters, selected one and handed it to Thorndyke.

Thorndyke glanced at the postmark ("London, E."), and having taken out the key, extracted the letter, which he opened and held so that Miller and I could see it. The paper bore the heading, "Baltic Shipping Company, Wapping," and a written heading, "S.S. *Gothenburg*," and the letter was brief and to the point:

Dear Sir,

I am giving up my chambers at No. 51, as I have been suddenly called abroad. I enclose the key, but am not troubling you with the rent The sale of my costly furniture will more than cover it, and the surplus can be expended on painting the garden railings.

Yours sincerely,
A. Carrington.

Thorndyke smilingly replaced the letter and the key in the envelope and asked:

"What is the furniture like?"

"You'll see," chuckled the porter, "if you care to look at the rooms. And I think they might suit. They're a good set."

"Quiet?"

"Yes, pretty quiet. There's a metallurgist overhead—Highley—used to be Burt and Highley, but Burt has gone to the City, and I don't think Highley does much business now."

"Let me see," said Thorndyke, "I think I used to meet Highley sometimes—a tall, dark man, isn't he?"

"No, that would be Burt. Highley is a little, fairish man, rather bald, with a pretty rich complexion."

"Hadn't we better have a look at the rooms?" Miller interrupted.

"Can we see them, Mr. Larkin?" asked Thorndyke.

"Certainly," was the reply. "You've

got the key. Let me have it when you've seen the rooms; and whatever you do," he added with a broad grin, "be careful of the furniture."

"It looks," the Superintendent remarked as we crossed the inner court, "as if Mr. Carrington had done a mizzle. That's hopeful. And I see," he continued, glancing at the fresh paint on the door-post as we passed through the entry, "that he hasn't been here long."

We ascended to the first floor, and as Thorndyke unlocked and threw open the door, Miller laughed. The "costly furniture" consisted of a small kitchen table, a Windsor chair, and a dilapidated deck-chair. The kitchen contained a gas ring, a small saucepan and a frying-pan, and the bedroom was furnished with a camp-bed devoid of bed-clothes, a wash-hand basin on a packing case, and a water can.

"Hallo!" exclaimed the Superintendent. "He's left a hat behind. Quite a good hat, too." He took it down from the peg, glanced at its exterior and then, turning it over, looked inside. And then his mouth opened with a jerk.

"Great Solomon Eagle!" he gasped. "Do you see, doctor? It's *the* hat."

He held it out to us, and sure enough on the white silk lining of the crown were the embossed, gilt letters, D.B., just as Mr. Byramji had described them.

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed, as the Superintendent snatched up a greengrocer's paper bag from the kitchen floor and persuaded the hat into it, "it is undoubtedly the missing link. But what are you going to do now?"

"Do!" exclaimed Miller. "Why, I am going to collar the man. These Baltic boats put in at Hull and Newcastle—perhaps he didn't know that—and they are pretty slow boats, too. I shall wire to Newcastle to have the ship detained. I'll leave you to explain to the porter, and I owe you a thousand thanks for your valuable tip."

With this he bustled away, clasping the precious hat, and from the window we saw him hurry across the court and dart out through the postern into Fetter Lane.

"I think Miller was rather precipitate," said Thorndyke. "He should have got a description of the man and some further particulars."

"Yes," said I. "Miller had much better have waited until you had finished with Mr. Larkin But you can get some more particulars when we take back the key."

"We shall get more information from the gentleman who lives on the floor above, and I think we will go up and interview him now. I wrote to him last night and made a metallurgical appointment, signing myself W. Polton. Your name, if he should ask, is Stevenson."

¶

AS we ascended the stairs to the next floor, I meditated on the rather tortuous proceedings of my usually straightforward colleague. The use of the lumps of quartz was now obvious; but why these mysterious tactics? And why, before knocking at the door, did Thorndyke carefully take the reading of the gas meter on the landing?

The door was opened in response to our knock by a shortish, alert-looking, clean-shaved man in a white overall, who looked at us keenly and rather forbiddingly. But Thorndyke was geniality personified.

"How do you do, Mr. Highley?" said he, holding out his hand, which the metallurgist shook coolly. "You got my letter, I suppose?"

"Yes. But I am not Mr. Highley. He's away and I am carrying on. I think of taking over his business, if there is any to take over. My name is Sherwood. Have you got the samples?"

Thorndyke produced the canvas bag, which Mr. Sherwood took from him and emptied out on a bench, picking up the lumps of quartz one by one and examining them closely. Meanwhile Thorndyke took a rapid survey of the premises. Against the wall were two cupel furnaces and a third larger furnace like a small pottery kiln. On a set of narrow shelves were several rows of bone-ash cupels, looking like little white flower-pots, and near them was the cupel-press—an appliance into which powdered bone-ash was fed and compressed by a plunger to form the cupels—while by the side of the press was a tub of bone-ash—a good deal coarser, I noticed, than the usual fine powder. This coarseness was also observed by Thorndyke, who edged up to the tub and dipped his hand into the ash and then wiped his fingers on his handkerchief.

"This stuff doesn't seem to contain much gold," said Mr. Sherwood."

"What do you think of this?" asked Thorndyke, taking from his pocket the

small lump of glittering golden-looking mineral that he had picked out at the assayist's. Mr. Sherwood took it from him and examined it closely. "This looks more hopeful," said he; "rather rich, in fact."

Thorndyke received this statement with an unmoved countenance; but as for me, I stared at Mr. Sherwood in amazement. For this lump of glittering mineral was simply a fragment of common iron pyrites! It would not have deceived a schoolboy, much less a metallurgist.

Still holding the specimen, and taking a watchmaker's lens from a shelf, Mr. Sherwood moved over to the window. Simultaneously, Thorndyke stepped softly to the cupel shelves and quickly ran his eye along the rows of cupels. Presently he paused at one, examined it more closely, and then, taking it from the shelf, began to pick at it with his finger-nail.

At this moment Mr. Sherwood turned and observed him; and instantly there flashed into the metallurgist's face an expression of mingled anger and alarm.

"Put that down!" he commanded peremptorily, and then, as Thorndyke continued to scrape with his finger-nail, he shouted, "Do you hear? Drop it!"

Thorndyke took him literally at his word and let the cupel fall on the floor, when it shattered into innumerable fragments, of which one of the largest separated itself from the rest. Thorndyke pounced upon it and in an instantaneous glance as he picked it up, I recognised it as a calcined tooth.

Then followed a few moments of weird, dramatic silence. Thorndyke, holding the tooth between his finger and thumb, looked steadily into the eyes of the metallurgist; and the latter, pallid as a corpse, glared at Thorndyke and furtively unbottoned his overall.

Suddenly the silence broke into a tumult as bewildering as the crash of a railway collision. Sherwood's right hand darted under his overall. Instantly, Thorndyke snatched up another cupel and hurled it with such truth of aim that it shattered on the metallurgist's forehead. And as he flung the missile, he sprang forward, and delivered a swift upper-cut. There was a thunderous crash, a cloud of white dust, and an automatic pistol clattered along the floor.

I snatched up the pistol and rushed to my friend's assistance. But there was no need. With his great strength and his uncanny skill—to say nothing of the effects of the knock-out blow—Thorndyke had the man pinned down immovably.

"See if you can find some cord, Jervis," he said in a calm, quiet tone.

There was no difficulty about this, for several corded boxes stood in a corner of the laboratory. I cut off two lengths, with one of which I secured the prostrate man's arms and with the other fastened his knees.

"Now," said Thorndyke, "if you will take charge of his hands, we will make a preliminary inspection. Let us first see if he wears a belt."

Unbuttoning the man's waistcoat, he drew up the shirt, disclosing a broad, webbing belt furnished with several leather pockets, the buttoned flaps of which he felt carefully, regardless of the stream of threats and imprecations that poured from our victim's swollen lips. From the front pockets he proceeded to the back.

"Ah!" he exclaimed suddenly, "just turn him over, and look out for his heels."

We rolled our captive over, and as Thorndyke "skinned the rabbit," a central pocket came into view, into which, when he had unbuttoned it, he inserted his fingers. "Yes," he continued, "I think this is what we are looking for." He withdrew his fingers, between which he held a small packet of Japanese paper, and with feverish excitement I watched him open out layer after layer of the soft wrapping. As he turned back the last fold a wonderful crimson sparkle told me that the "great ruby" was found.

"There, Jervis," said Thorndyke, holding the magnificent gem towards me in the palm of his hand, "look on this beautiful, sinister thing, charged with untold potentialities of evil—and thank the gods that it is not yours."

He wrapped it up again carefully and, having bestowed it in an inner pocket, said, "And now give me the pistol and run down to the telegraph office and see if you can stop Miller. I should like him to have the credit for this."

I handed him the pistol and made my way out into Fetter Lane and so down to Fleet Street, where at the post office my urgent message was sent off to Scotland Yard immediately. In a few minutes the reply came that Superintendent Miller had not yet left and that he was starting immediately for Clifford's Inn. A quarter of an hour later he drove up in a hansom to the Fetter Lane gate and I conducted

him up to the second floor, where Thorndyke introduced him to his prisoner and witnessed the official arrest.

¶

"YOU don't see how I arrived at it," said Thorndyke as we walked homeward after returning the key. "Well, I am not surprised. The initial evidence was of the weakest; it acquired significance only by cumulative effect. Let us reconstruct it as it developed.

"The derelict hat was, of course, the starting-point. Now the first thing one noticed was that it appeared to have had more than one owner. No man would buy a new hat that fitted so badly as to need all that packing; and the arrangement of the packing suggested a long-headed man wearing a hat that had belonged to a man with a short head. Then there were the suggestions offered by the slips of paper. The fragmentary address referred to a place the name of which ended in 'n' and the remainder was evidently 'London, W.C.' Now what West Central place names end in 'n'? It was not a street, a square or a court, and Barbican is not in the W.C. district. It was almost certainly one of the half-dozen surviving Inns of Court or Chancery. But, of course, it was not necessarily the address of the owner of the hat.

"The other slip of paper bore the end of a word ending in 'el,' and another word ending in 'eep,' and connected with these were quantities stated in ounces and pennyweights troy weight. But the only persons who use troy weight are those who deal in precious metals. I inferred therefore that the 'el' was part of 'lemel,' and that the 'eep' was part of 'floor-sweep,' an inference that was supported by the respective quantities, three ounces five pennyweights of lemel and nine and a half ounces of floor-sweep."

"What is lemel?" I asked.

"It is the trade name for the gold or silver filings that collect in the 'skin' of a jeweller's bench. Floor-sweep is, of course, the dust swept up on the floor of a jeweller's or goldsmith's workshop. The lemel is actual metal, though not of uniform fineness, but the 'sweep' is a mixture of dirt and metal.

"This paper, then, was connected either with a goldsmith or a gold refiner—who might call himself an assayist or a metallurgist. The connection was supported by the leaf of a price list of gas stoves. A metallurgist would be kept well supplied with lists of gas stoves and furnaces. The traces of lead in the dust from the hat gave us another straw blowing in the same direction, for gold assayed by the dry process is fused in the cupel furnace with lead; and as the lead oxidises and the oxide is volatile, traces of lead would tend to appear in the dust deposited in the laboratory.

"The next thing to do was to consult the directory; and when I did so, I found that there were no goldsmiths in any of the Inns and only one assayist—Mr. Highley, of Clifford's Inn. The probabilities, therefore, slender as they were, pointed to some connection between this stray hat and Mr. Highley. And this was positively all the information that we had when we came out this afternoon.

"As soon as we got to Clifford's Inn, however, the evidence began to grow like a rolling snowball. First there was Larkin's contribution; and then there was the discovery of the missing hat. Now, as soon as I saw that hat my suspicions fell upon the man upstairs. I felt a conviction that the hat had been left there purposely and that the letter to Larkin was just a red herring to create a false trail. Nevertheless, the presence of that hat completely confirmed the other evidence. It showed that the apparent connection was a real connection."

"But," I ask, "what made you suspect the man upstairs?"

"My dear Jervis!" he exclaimed, "consider the facts. That hat was enough to hang the man who left it there. Can you imagine this astute, wary villain making such an idiot's mistake—going away and leaving the means of his conviction for any one to find? But you are forgetting that whereas the missing hat was found on the first floor, the murderer's hat was connected with the second floor. The evidence suggested that it was Highley's hat. And now, before we go on to the next stage, let me remind you of those fingerprints. Miller thought that their rough appearance was due to the surface on which they had been made. But it was not. They were the prints of a person who was suffering from ichthyosis, palmar psoriasis or some dry dermatitis.

"There is one other point. The man we

were looking for was a murderer. His life was already forfeit. To such a man another murder more or less is of no consequence. If this man, having laid the false trail, had determined to take sanctuary in Highley's rooms, it was probable that he had already got rid of Highley. And remember that a metallurgist has unrivalled means of disposing of a body; for not only is each of his muffle furnaces a miniature crematorium, but the very residue of a cremated body—bone-ash—is one of the materials of his trade.

"When we went upstairs, I first took the reading of the gas meter and ascertained that a large amount of gas had been used recently. Then, when we entered I took the opportunity to shake hands with Mr. Sherwood, and immediately I became aware that he suffered from a rather extreme form of ichthyosis. That was the first point of verification. Then we discovered that he actually could not distinguish between iron pyrites and auriferous quartz. He was not a metallurgist at all. He was a masquerader. Then the bone-ash in the tub was mixed with fragments of calcined bone, and the cupels all showed similar fragments. In one of them I could see part of the crown of a tooth. That was pure luck. But observe that by that time I had enough evidence to justify an arrest. The tooth served only to bring the affair to a crisis; and his response to my unspoken accusation saved us the trouble of further search for confirmatory evidence."

"What is not quite clear to me," said I, "is when and why he made away with Highley. As the body has been completely reduced to bone-ash, Highley must have been dead at least some days."

"Undoubtedly," Thorndyke agreed. "I take it that the course of events was somewhat like this: The police have been searching eagerly for this man, and every new crime must have made his position more unsafe—for a criminal can never be sure that he has not dropped some clue. It began to be necessary for him to make some arrangements for leaving the country and meanwhile to have a retreat in case his whereabouts should chance to be discovered. Highley's chambers were admirable for both purposes. Here was a solitary man who seldom had a visitor, and who would probably not be missed for some considerable time; and in those chambers were the means of rapidly and completely disposing of the body. The mere murder would be a negligible detail to this ruffian.

"I imagine that Highley was done to death at least a week ago, and that the murderer did not take up his new tenancy until the body was reduced to ash. With that large furnace in addition to the small ones, this would not take long. When the new premises were ready, he could make a sham disappearance to cover his actual flight later; and you must see how perfectly misleading that sham disappearance was. If the police had discovered that hat in the empty room only a week later, they would have been certain that he had escaped to one of the Baltic ports; and while they were following his supposed tracks, he could have gone off comfortably via Folkestone or Southampton."

"Then you think he had only just moved into Highley's rooms?"

"I should say he moved in last night. The murder of Byramji was probably planned on some information that the murderer had picked up, and as soon as it was accomplished he began forthwith to lay down the false tracks. When he reached his rooms yesterday afternoon, he must have written the letter to Larkin and gone off at once to the East End to post it. Then he probably had his bushy hair cut short and shaved off his beard and moustache—which would render him quite unrecognisable by Larkin—and moved into Highley's chambers, from which he would have quietly sallied forth in a few days' time to take his passage to the Continent. It was quite a good plan and but for the accident of taking the wrong hat, would almost certainly have succeeded."

Once every year, on the second of August, there is delivered with unfailing regularity at No. 5A King's Bench Walk a large box of carved sandalwood filled with the choicest Trichinopoly cheroots and accompanied by an affectionate letter from our late client, Mr. Byramji. For the second of August is the anniversary of the death (in the execution shed at Newgate) of Cornelius Barnett, otherwise known as the "New Jersey Sphinx."

An Avenger

And what became of his unalterable determination

By ANTON TCHEHOV

SHORTLY after finding his wife *in flagrante delicto* Fyodor Fyodorovitch Sigaev was standing in Schmuck and Co.'s, the gunsmiths, selecting a suitable revolver. His countenance expressed wrath, grief, and unalterable determination.

"I know what I must do," he was thinking. "The sanctities of the home are outraged, honour is trampled in the mud, vice is triumphant, and therefore as a citizen and a man of honour I must be their avenger. First, I will kill her and her lover and then myself."

He had not yet chosen a revolver or killed anyone, but already in imagination he saw three blood-stained corpses, broken skulls, brains oozing from them, the commotion, the crowd of gaping spectators, the post-mortem. . . . With the malignant joy of an insulted man he pictured the horror of the relations and the public, the agony of the traitress, and was mentally reading leading articles on the destruction of the traditions of the home.

The shopman, a sprightly little Frenchified figure with rounded belly and white waistcoat, displayed the revolvers, and smiling respectfully and scraping with his little feet observed:

". . . I would advise you, M'sieur, to take this superb revolver, the Smith and Wesson pattern, the last word in the science of firearms: triple-action, with ejector, kills at six hundred paces, central sight. Let me draw your attention, M'sieu, to the beauty of the finish. The most fashionable system, M'sieu. We sell a dozen every day for burglars, wolves, and lovers. Very correct and powerful action, hits at a great distance, and kills wife and lover with one bullet. As for suicide, M'sieu, I don't know a better pattern."

The shopman pulled and cocked the trigger, breathed on the barrel, took aim, and affected to be breathless with delight. Looking at his ecstatic countenance, one might have supposed that he would readily have put a bullet through his brains if he had only possessed a revolver of such a superb pattern as a Smith-Wesson.

"And what price?" asked Sigaev.

"Forty-five roubles, M'sieu."

"Mm! . . . that's too dear for me."

"In that case, M'sieu, let me offer you another make, somewhat cheaper. Here, if you'll kindly look, we have an immense choice, at all prices. . . . Here, for instance, this revolver of the Lefaucher pattern costs only eighteen roubles, but . . ." (the shopman pursed up his face contemptuously) ". . . but, M'sieu, it's an old-fashioned make. They are only bought by hysterical ladies or the mentally deficient. To commit suicide or shoot one's wife with a Lefaucher revolver is considered bad form nowadays. Smith-Wesson is the only pattern that's correct style."

"I don't want to shoot myself or to kill anyone," said Sigaev, lying sullenly. "I am buying it simply for a country cottage . . . to frighten away burglars. . . ."

"That's not our business, what object you have in buying it." The shopman smiled, dropping his eyes discreetly. "If we were to investigate the object in each case, M'sieu, we should have to close our shop. To frighten burglars Lefaucher is not a suitable pattern, M'sieu, for it goes off with a faint, muffled sound. I would suggest Mortimer's, the so-called duelling pistol. . . ."

"Shouldn't I challenge him to a duel?" flashed through Sigaev's mind. "It's doing him too much honour, though. . . . Beasts like that are killed like dogs. . . ."

The shopman, swaying gracefully and tripping to and fro on his little feet, still smiling and chattering, displayed before him a heap of revolvers. The most inviting and impressive of all was the Smith and Wesson's. Sigaev picked up a pistol of that pattern, gazed blankly at it, and sank into brooding. His imagination pictured how he would blow out their brains, how

blood would flow in streams over the rug and the parquet, how the traitress's legs would twitch in her last agony. . . . But that was not enough for his indignant soul. The picture of blood, wailing, and horror did not satisfy him. He must think of something more terrible.

"I know! I'll kill myself and him," he thought, "but I'll leave her alive. Let her pine away from the stings of conscience and the contempt of all surrounding her. For a sensitive nature like hers that will be far more agonizing than death."

And he imagined his own funeral: he, the injured husband, lies in his coffin with a gentle smile on his lips, and she, pale, tortured by remorse, follows the coffin like a Niobe, not knowing where to hide herself to escape from the withering, contemptuous looks cast upon her by the indignant crowd.

"I see, M'sieu, that you like the Smith and Wesson make," the shopman broke in upon his broodings. "If you think it too dear, very well, I'll knock off five roubles. . . . But we have other makes, cheaper."

The little Frenchified figure turned gracefully and took down another dozen cases of revolvers from the shelf.

"Here, M'sieu, price thirty roubles. That's not expensive, especially as the rate of exchange has dropped terribly and the Customs duties are rising every hour. M'sieu, I vow I am a conservative, but even I am beginning to murmur. Why, with the rate of exchange and the Customs tariff, only the rich can purchase firearms. There's nothing left for the poor but Tula weapons and phosphorus matches, and Tula weapons are a misery! You may aim at your wife with a Tula revolver and shoot yourself through the shoulder-blade."

Sigaev suddenly felt mortified and sorry that he would be dead, and would miss seeing the agonies of the traitress. Revenge is only sweet when one can see and taste its fruits, and what sense would there be in it if he were lying in his coffin, knowing nothing about it?

"Hadn't I better do this?" he pondered. "I'll kill him, then I'll go to his funeral and look on, and after the funeral I'll kill myself. They'd arrest me, though, before the funeral, and take away my pistol. . . . And so I'll kill him, she shall remain alive, and I . . . for the time, I'll not kill myself, but go and be arrested. I shall always have time to kill myself. There will be this advantage about being arrested, that at the preliminary investigation I shall have an opportunity of exposing to the authorities and to the public all the infamy of her conduct. If I kill myself she may, with her characteristic duplicity and impudence, throw all the blame on me, and society will justify her behaviour and will very likely laugh at me. . . . If I remain alive, then . . ."

A minute later he was thinking:

"Yes, if I kill myself I may be blamed and suspected of petty feeling. . . . Besides, why should I kill myself? That's one thing. And for another, to shoot oneself is cowardly. And so I'll kill him and let her live, and I'll face my trial. I shall be tried, and she will be brought into court as a witness. . . . I can imagine her confusion, her disgrace when she is examined by my counsel! The sympathies of the court, of the Press, and of the public will certainly be with me."

While he deliberated the shopman displayed his wares, and felt it incumbent upon him to entertain his customer.

"Here are English ones, a new pattern, only just received," he prattled on. "But I warn you, M'sieu, all these systems pale beside the Smith and Wesson. The other day—as I dare say you have read—an officer bought from us a Smith and Wesson. He shot his wife's lover, and—would you believe it?—the bullet passed through him, pierced the bronze lamp, then the piano, and ricochetted back from the piano, killing the lap dog and bruising his wife. A magnificent record redounding to the honour of our firm! The officer is now under arrest. He will no doubt be convicted and sent to penal servitude. In the first place, our penal code is quite out of date; and, secondly, M'sieu, the sympathies of the court are always with the lover. Why is it? Very simple, M'sieu. The judges and the jury and the prosecutor and the counsel for the defence are all living with other men's wives, and it'll add to their comfort that there will be one husband the less in Russia. Society would be pleased if the Government were to send all the husbands to Sahalin.

"Oh, M'sieu, you don't know how it excites my indignation to see the corruption of morals nowadays. To love other men's wives is as much the regular thing to-day as to smoke other men's cigarettes and to read other men's books. Every year our trade gets worse and worse—it doesn't mean that wives are more faithful, but that

husbands resign themselves to their position and are afraid of the law and penal servitude."

The shopman looked round and whispered: "And whose fault is it, M'sieu? The Government's."

"To go to Sahalin for the sake of a pig like that—there's no sense in that either," Sigaev pondered. "If I go to penal servitude it will only give my wife an opportunity of marrying again and deceiving a second husband. She would triumph. . . . And so I will leave *her* alive, I won't kill myself, *him* . . . I won't kill either. I must think of something more sensible and more effective. I will punish them with my contempt, and will take divorce proceedings that will make a scandal."

"Here, M'sieu, is another make," said the shopman, taking down another dozen from the shelf. "Let me call your attention to the original mechanism of the lock."

In view of his determination a revolver was now of no use to Sigaev, but the shopman, meanwhile, getting more and more enthusiastic, persisted in displaying his wares before him. The outraged husband began to feel ashamed that the shopman should be taking so much trouble on his account for nothing, that he should be smiling, wasting time, displaying enthusiasm for nothing.

"Very well, in that case," he muttered, "I'll look in again later on . . . or I'll send someone."

He didn't see the expression of the shopman's face, but to smooth over the awkwardness of the position a little he felt called upon to make some purchase. But what should he buy? He looked round the walls of the shop to pick out something inexpensive, and his eyes rested on a green net hanging near the door.

"That's . . . what's that?" he asked.

"That's a net for catching quails."

"And what price is it?"

"Eight roubles, M'sieu."

"Wrap it up for me. . . ."

The outraged husband paid his eight roubles, took the net, and, feeling even more outraged, walked out of the shop.

MY BRIGANTINE

My brigantine!
Just in thy mould and beauteous in thy form,
Gentle in roll and buoyant on the surge,
Light as the sea-fowl rocking in the storm,
In breeze and gale thy onward course we urge,
My water-queen!

Lady of mine!
More light and swift than thou none thread the sea,
With surer keel or steadier on its path;
We brave each waste of ocean-mystery
And laugh to hear the howling tempest's wrath,
For we are thine!

My brigantine!
Trust to the mystic power that points thy way,
Trust to the eye that pierces from afar,
Trust to the red meteors that around thee play,
And, fearless, trust the Sea-Green Lady's Star,
Thou bark divine!

JAMES FENIMORE COOPER.

Weeds

Of man who was always kind to women

By NEWMAN FLOWER

HE always called himself Monsieur Jacques.

It may have been the name given him at his baptism in some place which no one had ever been able to locate. But most of those in the boarding-house believed that it was a name he had assumed, or which, may be, clung to him through old association. Or perhaps — so they speculated—there was hidden under it a name far more ugly, better forgotten and as discreetly buried. But from habit more than anything else, they called him Monsieur Jacques.

Not that he seemed French. He spoke English perfectly. But there was a certain immaculacy about his dress and habits that suggested French influence.

Possibly he was fifty-five; certainly not more. And rather short and bald, with a tendency to fatness. Tubby would perhaps describe his peculiar opulence better. His forehead was abnormally wide and the skin seemed stretched white and thin over it, and his eyes were grey and deep and rather searching and fearless.

He was particular about his clothes. Not that he dressed to fashion. On the contrary, he seemed to wear old clothes, a blue lounge suit usually, which somehow, by attention and manipulation, appeared always respectable and clean. His shirts, too, though a little behind the fashion in colour, bore no real antiquity and the cuffs, if somewhat worn, were carefully trimmed with a pair of scissors each morning. Indeed, in this boarding house, where life seemed a little soiled and spent, he had a modernism that clung particularly to him. That gave him style.

In looks he was rather ordinary. A little pointed grey beard, a moustache carefully waxed. In his left eye he wore a monocle with a broad black ribbon attached. But he wore the monocle and its attachment with ease, as though it were an appendage rather than a necessity, but without affectation or conceit.

Monsieur Jacques was, in fact, an essential part of this boarding house, as much a part of it as the early Victorian furniture which struggled now to appear Georgian and in the darkest corners seemed to achieve its aim. He occupied two rooms in the house, a sitting-room facing on the main street and a bedroom adjoining. And he always sat at the window of this sitting-room. They sometimes said that he sat there from breakfast-time till the darkening of the gas announced that Monsieur Jacques was going to bed. If he were not at the window during the day some of the boarders looked for him rather anxiously at dinner when he came down to the main room. In short, his habits, if peculiar, were never startling. They were merely ordinary with a tendency towards eccentricity.

Miss Flannery, an elderly person with silvering hair and a hooked nose, who sat beside Monsieur Jacques at dinner and as regularly ate his bread in mistake for her own, took him to task on this particular evening about his habit of sitting at his open window in winter and summer. She lisped a little and Monsieur Jacques was in consequence over-attentive to her because physical handicap always hurt him and softened a nature which in many ways had become hardened.

"I alwayth knowth our houth becoth of you at the window," she told him. "It ith thupid of me alwayth to look for you'th firth. Motht thupid. But I do. When you dithappear I am lotht. I am really. Why do you alwayth thit at windowth?"

Two slight furrows furtively crept round Monsieur Jacques' eyes and were gone. He smiled with the old geniality which they knew so well.

"Have you ever looked into an orange sunset at the end of our street and seen things?" he asked rather quietly.

Miss Flannery lifted her eyebrows. She waited, wanting to speak but shuffling for

words. Verily the good m'sieu seemed a little peculiar and unusual.

"Oh, yeth," she said a little nervously. "But what a peculiar quethion."

"I don't think so," he answered her, and picked up two rose petals that had fallen from the late rose at her breast and put them carefully on her plate. "I really don't think so. In a way it's natural. We are all dreamers in here. We meet once—twice—a day at meals. Rather shy people who happen into a crowd. And the rest of the time we dream. Just for those two hours or so that we gather together do we show each other round our lives as if they were our gardens. And we apologise for the weeds. Always we apologise for the weeds."

"I haven't any uthe for weedth," said Miss Flannery affably.

"May be, dear lady, you have never known them in your garden," Monsieur Jacques answered. "But with me it has been so different. I suppose the soil was bad. I don't know. But there can be great beauty in weeds."

"I thuppose there can," Miss Flannery agreed and chased the chicken's drumstick round the plate.

"Always," he said with emphasis.

"And what thort of thingth do you thee from your windowth?" she inquired.

Once again Monsieur Jacques' face clouded.

"I look for weeds," he said. "Down there in the street. Now and again I see something else. I suppose it is imagination really. Or the quiet that stirs things. But when the sun is orange and plays hide-and-seek round the spire of St. Michael's Church I often see in it my ships!"

"Thips?" said Miss Flannery in a foolish, distant echo.

"Yes, ships. My ships. We all have ships which belong to some day that is going to follow an orange sunset. When we'll get up glad in the morning to greet them. . . . I watch for my ships just as the light is going, when the street lamps begin to glimmer like harbour-lights and the houses in the dark look like lumps of rock with horrible edges. Sometimes I see these ships of mine. But I usually lose them in the dark."

"The dark ith very bad for thome thips," Miss Flannery agreed.

He nodded.

"Always for mine," he said and turned the subject

The dinner-table conversation at Belmont House was ever like that. It led to nowhere. It was a great solemn river, heavy, slow-flowing. And one floated down upon it only to become suddenly becalmed in a sidewater. The reason may have been that everyone in Belmont House lived on memories and never on ambitions.

In the drawing-room that evening Miss Flannery repeated the conversation about "thips" to those assembled. Monsieur Jacques never went to the drawing-room, for as soon as dinner had ended he always sought the silence of his own room.

Miss Flannery excitedly asked the company what the funny m'sieu had meant when he spoke of his "thips."

"Balmy!" exclaimed Major Tremaine, pushing a florid face round the edge of the evening paper. "Balmy. Damned balmy!"

"He thits at windowth and thinkth of thips!" mocked a youth, running his fingers up and down the piano.

"You are rather rude!" exclaimed Miss Flannery, flushing hotly. "Very rude. In my dayth youth wath conthiderate of thuffering."

"Sorry! I didn't mean to be. Only most infernal incredulous." And the youth rolled into a jazz tune.

Monsieur Jacques, sitting beside his window in the dusk of the autumn evening, was supremely unconscious of this little passage of arms. It never occurred to him that he was ever the subject of criticism or even of remark. He was utterly alone. And when he withdrew from his solitude and appeared at meals his attitude was that of a man who knew that life was good, who had a wonderful good nature which seemed to radiate contentment and sometimes was more than a little soothing.

But ultimately the first whisper of scandal closed about him—he who had so long neglected it—just as bubbles in a stream inevitably close around a passing twig. And then Monsieur Jacques suddenly became aware that they had begun to stare at him when he appeared at meals, that they appeared to draw more towards themselves and leave him alone. They talked together and nodded as he passed. Others merely held aloof. Frigidly aloof. Even Miss Flannery ceased to nibble his bread.

The story became conviction in the boarding-house that Monsieur Jacques was known—frequently known—to call those of

the other sex who passed by in the street up to his sitting-room, where he would talk to them, usually with the door ajar it is true. At first those in Belmont House believed that his visitors were friends of his, or poor relations whom he wished to secrete in some manner, since he never introduced them to his fellow boarders, even when they passed on the stairs. By some intuition they became suspicious—they appeared suddenly to discover it—that all was not well. Monsieur Jacques was not quite the person they had supposed him to be and his visitors were beyond the pale of decent society. The discovery was something of a terrible calamity and upheaval which seemed to blast to the very roots the moral rectitude of the people in Belmont House and they would have asked him to leave, but there was no definite evidence of any wrong-doing.

But Monsieur Jacques became a tainted personage to them. They shunned him and thereby forced him to still greater solitudes. Thus driven, he now rarely appeared at meals, but took his food at small restaurants and eating-houses in odd by-streets, rather happy with his cutlet and half-flask of chianti and his evening paper and a little soothed by the steady coming and going of small hustled people like himself.

At Belmont House they remarked that his abstention from their society was open confession and cowardice. Then, as someone remarked, his "nattiness" was that of a person of questionable record. Presently even his eye-glass lost its respectability and was declared to be a means to a disreputable end.

"Weedth and thips! Thuch nonthenth!" exclaimed Miss Flannery.

"Rank outsider! Of course, he drinks," replied the major, rather certain that all people, including himself, drank more than was really good for them, but not as much as they might. "Of course he drinks, I tell you. And drink's hell!"

Vaguely Monsieur Jacques heard these things. Perhaps they meant him to hear them.

But he only smiled a little.

II

MONSIEUR JACQUES padded lightly up the stairs of the boarding house towards his apartments and following close behind him was a young woman.

It was late in the afternoon and the boarding house was almost empty. Tea was over and a maid was clearing the cups and plates noisily from the drawing-room.

He glanced along the passage rather furtively as he passed up and was glad to be unobserved. Not that he was afraid, but his soul had become a little sensitive to criticism. When he thought about it he realised the folly of caring at all. Some people rushed into these things and brazened them out; but a man must be born to do it. He knew that. It seemed so easy and yet to him so difficult.

The woman who followed him could not have been more than twenty years of age. She had low folds of brown hair that drooped over her ears beneath the brim of her hat. Her eyes were deep brown with very black lashes, her mouth small, with firm lips, rather red and with a promise of ripeness. And she had a plaintive prettiness which attracts men—a prettiness which in odd flashes is suggestive of beauty that on closer attention is ever elusive, but the presence of which is haunting. She was quietly and well dressed in a tailor-made costume, with short skirts and rather bold open-work stockings, terminating in suede shoes that moved noiselessly on the stairs.

They entered Monsieur Jacques' sitting-room and he let the door stand ajar as was his custom.

"Sit down," he said. He was a little abrupt, but possibly nervousness or the threat of discovery had caused it. "I want to go on talking as we did in the teashop." He sat down in the armchair facing her and crossed his legs. "I'm not adventuring really, but you talk differently from other women. Most women. You know——" he opened the cigarette box on the table beside him and held it out to her, but she shook her head. "You know, it did me good, your brave view of things. Hearing you talk. You've a wonderful courage."

She did not seem to be listening.

"I don't know why I came here," she said. She looked aimlessly round the room, out at the window and then slowly fixed her eyes upon him. "I really don't know why I came. Bit of a mug's game."

"I know why you came," he replied, drawing happily at his cigarette. "We'd been friends for two hours. That's why you came."

She laughed. She liked the camaraderie

in his mood. He looked rather fat and happy perched in the chair and he amused her. She knew the dour moods in men and he was anything but dour. He almost seemed to be sincerely glad because he had her to talk to.

"Are you a lonely sort of bird?" she asked wistfully.

"I say!"

"What's the matter?"

He got up and knelt down quickly before her.

"Your shoes are infernal wet. I'm going to take them off."

"The devil you aren't." She twined her legs round the chair. "Don't play the giddy fool! . . . You're a funny sort of flunkey, aren't you? . . . You—you old rip!"

He sat back on his heels and looked up at her laughing.

"I think you said your name was Alice. And I'm not a rip! And I'm not philandering . . . You gorgeous bit of youth! . . . Alice!"

"Miss Royds to you if you're going to muck about with my shoes."

"D'you know, Alice, when I was a youth girls used to say if I ordered them to do things——"

"Ordered them! The sauce! I knew you were the sort of man who'd been brought up wrong. One of those chummy sort of rascals. I know your kind!"

"I wonder if you do!" he ruminated. "Anyhow, I'm going to take your shoes off."

He caught a reluctant foot, tugged at the lace and had removed first one shoe and then the other before she could protest. He got up quickly and stepped backwards towards the fire and stood on the curb, laughing at her angry face.

"It's useless getting the wind up," he said. "You might have got pneumonia and died. What about that? You're one of those girls who remain pretty after they've become old, so it's no good trying to die young."

"I think you're a bit of a cad!" she snapped.

"You must make allowances. I've always been accustomed to having my own way. I've been rather spoiled. . . . And you've got rather pretty feet."

She drew them quickly under the chair.

"I don't see that it matters to you if they are wet." She bent down and picked up one of the shoes and examined the sole, then looked up at him hesitatingly. "Why did you come up to my table in the teashop and sit down and talk to me?"

"You wanted me to. You expected me to. You'd have been rather hurt if I hadn't. You watched me far more carefully than you did that egg you were eating. I know what you were thinking: I-will-make-him-come-to-this-table!"

"I couldn't quite place you," she admitted.

"So you meant me to come to your table in order to explore me?"

"I suppose it was that. Women have to be curious to live. Some women."

They fell then into easy conversation. Her temper had disappeared. She was like the sun peering round the edge of an April cloud.

He told her about Paris; somehow she liked hearing about Paris. And Lisbon. He had been to Lisbon and travelled up through Portugal. He tried to describe the rugged strength of the mountains, but she cut him short by asking if he had been to Oporto, because she loved port wine.

"I was going to marry a man in the wine biz," she told him.

"And you didn't?"

"Oh, no. He didn't want marriage." The smile crept from her face. "That's why I was in the teashop."

Monsieur Jacques adjusted his eye-glass carefully and studied her for a while in silence.

"I was going to ask you that, some day," he said. "But it's 'fernal cheek for a man to go butting in on things which a woman hugs to her soul." He approached and sat on the arm of the chair. "Look here, Alice, why do you think I got you to come here?"

"I thought I guessed," she said, looking away from him.

"But you didn't. I wanted you to tell me about that chap in the wine biz."

"Oh, lord. I'm wasting my time. But what's it to you?"

"Nothing really. But I thought I might be of little help."

"I don't want help."

"Your pride doesn't."

"No. I don't."

"But you hate your life. You know that."

"All girls do. Unless they've grown dead to things."

"But you haven't. You are only very weary of men, to say nothing of being properly fed up with me!"

"Possibly. Only I'd like to know what the game is. I'd much rather you let me go. A girl can't muck about. . . . And it's nearly seven."

"When did all this happen?" he asked, picking up the shoes and propping them up in the grate. Very carefully he kept his back to her.

She did not answer. But suddenly she jumped to her feet.

"What's the game?" she asked angrily.

Monsieur Jacques turned slowly. Her youth flung on the defensive pleased him, gratified some secret sense that loved courage.

"The game? My dear, there is no game."

"Don't fool me! I'll raise hell in the house before you try your silly kid tricks on me. Of course there's a game. There's always a game. Men don't take sudden fancies to women out of charity. Your kind doesn't. Not the men I've known."

"Your tirade contains one gross misstatement," he replied quietly.

"I suppose you're going to say you're in love with me or rot like that."

"No. Because—forgive me—it is not a fact."

"Give me my shoes!"

He said nothing, but picking up the shoes felt each one carefully. Then he handed them back to her.

"I think the right one is still rather damp at the toe," he said in a tone of apology.

She snatched them from his hand and bending over the chair, began to put them on. He watched her, dropping his monocle, then carefully replacing it.

He coughed.

"What did you do with the child?" he asked.

The fingers lacing the shoe ceased their movement. But she remained bending over the shoe and he saw her cheeks ablaze. He heard her quick intake of breath.

"The child?"

"Yes, Alice. There was a child. Don't let's play ducks and drakes with facts, my dear."

She stood up then, the shoe still unlaced, and went closer to him and looked into his face. She was still on the defensive, but afraid.

"Who are you?" she asked.

"Who am I? Jean Jacques. Quite an ordinary person—so they say of me—with a pretty taste in neckties! People don't always take to me, you know."

"I can believe that!" she threw back.

"I suppose really I'm a dreamer." He looked away from her. "I think dreaming is my trade in life."

"Blundering!" she corrected. "Blundering in on other people's affairs. A nosey-parker kind of person!"

His lips tightened.

"I am sorry," he said weakly, "but I'm afraid you're right. I do blunder. An ox in a china-shop sort of business. And yet——"

"Yes?" she said, waiting.

"There are things I want. I'm desperate in my effort for an ideal, a dream. . . . D'you know what I'd like them to put on my tombstone if I died to-night?"

The incongruity of the question brushed aside her temper. She became a little afraid of him.

"I'd like them to put: 'He was always kind to women.' I've tried to earn it. I've failed, but I've tried. Hard. Desperately hard. I don't want those stereotyped eulogies of virtues I never had. I don't want suggestions of a heaven I may never find. . . . You know, I don't believe all the Bible. For me the Bible is a rather beautiful dream, just as one goes in one's sleep into a very beautiful country, exploring and satisfying and soothed. But there is one thing in the Bible that is not a dream to me. It's real; to me an almighty thing. It's that bit in the Gospel about the treatment of women. . . . Oh, I'm not preaching. But every man has an ideal in his life and that's mine!"

She watched him as he turned and flicked the ash of his cigarette in the grate, waiting there and looking into the flames as if he were thinking. She felt she must say something, but her thoughts were aimless and elusive. But he seemed in a few minutes to have grown completely apart from her. She could not understand, but she had had to listen.

"I knew you'd had a child," he said, switching round and balancing himself on the curb. "Never mind how I knew."

"But how could you know? I've tried to hide things. To clean the slate."

"I found out," he answered. "That's why I followed you, why I came and sat at your table, why I got you here."

"Why—you—got—me—here?"

He nodded.

"And I lied to you. I told you there wasn't a game. And there was."

"Then what is the game?"

"To find out about that child. And its father. Suppose it was the chap in the wine biz?"

"Can't you shut up about it?" she exclaimed with vehemence. "It's no good groping in the mud."

"But you loved him?"

"Yes. Till it all smashed. I tell you, I've cut it out. He's probably dead by now. Come to think of it, he *was* consumptive."

Monsieur Jacques stroked his little beard. He became very serious. There were things he would have liked to say, but which with an effort he kept in suppression. There was in him a rising sense of injustice that in cutting it all out, as she had said, she had cut the child out. Moreover, in Monsieur Jacques existed a quaint and rather different tenderness towards children. He did not understand them; he was overwhelmed with self-consciousness in their presence. But their claims, their needs were a demanding influence in his life.

"This child, my dear." He began fussing about with his cigarette-holder, fumbling, he seemed, for words. "I wonder why people shut away the memories of old passions that have had bad endings, much as they would put away old luggage in a lumber-room? Giving beauty to dust and cobwebs, I call it. For a real love affair that *is* real—aye, though it be illicit—hallows itself. I don't mean coarse passion. I've no use for that. But love that sanctifies a place and leaves its fragrance long after the temple has been torn down. The sort of thing you can look back upon and say: 'I'm glad it happened!' . . That child remains to you as the memory of those days. And they were good days. You know that."

"I suppose they were."

She relapsed into her chair, tired and irritated.

"Of course they were. And that child's your treasure. Where's it now?"

She hesitated.

"Kept by a widow person. I pay her. Really I do."

"Grudgingly?"

"Of course. If you must be a pig and put it like that. But one doesn't want encumbrances."

"Encumbrances? Memories!" He leant over the chair. "You know, Life's a great garden. Do you know what they call you women in the garden?"

"Weeds, I should say. Oh, I know how little we count. I've no mistaken ideas about things. I'm only twenty, but I've explored hell since I was seventeen."

"And have you never seen beauty in weeds?" he asked. "I have. As a kid I hated to pull up a weed. I loved their little pink and white eyes showing when all the flowers I cultivated slept. They reminded me then that things lived. The flowers I'd striven for failed me in the bad moods of spring. They wanted the sun. But the weeds yielded me flowers when the sun had missed its place in the sky. . . . I never destroyed a weed."

"And spoiled your garden!" she exclaimed, catching his mood.

"No. I just made Nature my gardener and sacked my man."

She laughed back at him.

"You dear fool!"

"Was I a fool? . . . I wonder!"

"You're a bit mad. Seeing beauty in weeds. I'm a weed. One of those long 'straggly' ones! Society would tear me out by the roots. I suppose I ought to be torn out by the roots. I'm poisonous. . Were you ever married?"

"No, I was never married."

"But just imagine! What would your wife, if you'd had one, have said to a person like me?"

"If I had married—my wife—would have been very kind to you. Because—well, because she would have understood."

"That's a bit more of your beautiful dream." She leant forward, her chin on her hand. "What made me a weed?"

He talked to her then. Very seriously and quietly Almost light-heartedly. He appeared as a person without a mission; his talk wandered on as a river might ramble aimlessly towards no sea.

But suddenly he got up and went back to the fire and stood there, his legs apart, and studied her for a few moments without speaking.

"I've got two hundred children!" he said at length. His silliness made her cynical and quick to retort.

"Of course you number them? Rather like the kings of England. James the First, James the Second . . ."

"No," he replied. "Not quite like that.

I mean that two hundred—I think, to be precise, two hundred and seven children—call me father."

"My child magnified two hundred and seven times!" she laughed. "Great Jerusalem!"

"And I wish I'd got a million!"

"You ought to have lived in Old Testament days. You're a few thousand years behind your time. They would have cottoned on to you as some lad! Fancy you and your lot in the Ark! Old man Noah would have got into a row for having no Plimsoll mark!"

He did not reply, but walked across to the bookcase and unconsciously began to gather together some books.

She got up and crept quietly to his side and touched his arm.

"I didn't mean to hurt, I'm a cynical beast. But——"

A little rush of wind in the gathering dusk without pushed the ivy with a scrabbling sound across the window-pane. He heard it and gripped her wrist fiercely and turned towards the window.

"Whenever I hear that noise it always seems to me like finger-nails on glass. Little fingers. Children asking to be let in."

She drew away from him frightened. Yet nothing would have compelled her to leave the room, though the door was ajar behind her. She knew that she could not go away, that something about him, some force invisible and binding, was holding her. Had he touched her again or even come near she might have screamed or been infinitely soothed. Whatever he had asked her to do she would have done. Whatever he had asked her to give she would have given. Through fear.

He turned towards her smiling.

"I want your child," he said.

The demand was so unexpected, the break in the tension so definite, that she almost burst out laughing.

"You want—Jim?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"I want him for keeps. To bring him up. Make a man of him. Make him sterling English. Real weather-beaten English."

She stared at him wide-eyed and again came the desire to laugh.

"I want you to think round things—not frivol about," he said. "You've never thought much about humanity because to you humanity has always been hard, brutal, inevitable."

"Yes. I think it's always been that way with me."

"And you've got nothing out of it but sadness. Sadness with little splashes of colour that were more vivid because of the contrast. Humanity has done its best to make you a weed. But you know—though probably you've never thought of it quite like this—God made weeds to be the runners-up to the flowers in the garden. To set the pace to sweetness. So He gave an infinite sweetness to some weeds to hasten the sluggard violet, the nurtured and careful thing that wished to flower in its own chosen day of sun, and in its own appointed time. . . . That's why I want you to give me Jim. I'll make him good for you. I'll make him"—he threw out his hands—"so that when he's grown up you'll be proud of him. You'll want him then. He'll be protection; a big strong thing. And I'll make him kind; I promise you that. You know, he won't love you through the widow person, because children love direct or not at all. But I'll make him love you as the most beautiful thing in the whole garden of humanity as he ever finds it."

There was nothing sympathetic in his voice; he spoke calmly and passionlessly. But he made her wonder. She had never thought of Jim like that. Growing up. Or Jim thinking of women at all. Or about anything that really mattered. After all, he was something loaned out: a piece of household furniture on which she was paying for storage. And the possibilities of Jim—had Jim possibilities? He was only a little chattel. A very unconsidered and unwanted chattel.

Had Monsieur Jacques been less matter-of-fact, Alice Royds would have collapsed in tears. She shrank still closer into the corner of her chair and Monsieur Jacques seemed to become taller and wider and more commanding as she looked at him.

He went on talking, but she heard very little of what he said. But at last she asked:

"What do you fancy you're going to get out of it?"

"Didn't I tell you I wish I had a million children? Some people collect china or books or postage stamps or other trumperies. But I collect life. I find it so much more interesting."

So it came about that James Royds.

aged four, passed into the care of Monsieur Jacques, who appointed himself his legal guardian and vowed by the law to do endless things for James Royds until the boy should become twenty-one years of age.

Then was James Royds spirited away to a large house in the country where there were scores of other children of about his own age, where there was a wonderful garden and swings and donkeys to ride, and every toy that was ever known to childhood.

And occasionally his mother came to see him, till presently her visits became more frequent. Once she cried over him, which made him wonder, and ever after that he knew that she was more and more loath to leave him and he felt somehow that he was more and more loath to see her go.

But when once she had passed beyond the big iron gates his heart seemed to cease from bothering him. Not that he cared for her any the less, but to James Royds at the present time there was no world outside the deodar at the end of the garden hedge.

With Alice Royds it was different. She became irresistibly drawn towards the place and sometimes in the stillness of night she would wake up and lie in the dark wondering about it. Ultimately, with the help of Monsieur Jacques, she secured a post as a warehouse clerk. At first the life was colourless and dull; she became fretful, irritable. But eventually the mood passed. From the world which had been hers a new world appeared to be flung off which gravitated towards and ended in circling round a child.

And noticing this for the first time—it was her moist eyes, which he observed one day when they met in the garden, that did it, one August Bank Holiday—Monsieur Jacques said nothing but smiled again to himself.

A self-satisfied smile. Rather like that of a man who stands on the flags of a quay and sees a sail that he cherishes bear down towards home.

III

ABOUT three months after the first visit of Alice Royds to the boarding house, Monsieur Jacques was sitting at his open window in the dusk. Autumn was still lingering and the pavement below was gold with a litter of plane leaves.

For the first time in many years Monsieur Jacques felt intensely lonely. It was as if he now discovered that he was a being unto himself, that there was no one with whom he could converse other than in ordinary platitudes. And he felt more acutely than he had ever done the bitterness of his fellow-boarders, which had grown about him like a stockade. He wondered if he should change his place of abode, or if the power of pushing aside intended hurt had really left him.

"One gets old. One feels things," he said to the open air. "Fifty-five! And yet it's not a great time. If one could start life with one's plans made. Without having to grope for knowledge. This weary groping for understanding. . . ."

He lit a cigarette and watched the smoke coil out on the still air. He did not hear the opening of the door. But presently he became instinctively aware that he was not alone in the room, and when he looked round he saw a lean, cadaverous youth standing in the darkest corner.

Monsieur Jacques started up and switched on the light. The youth—he could not have been more than twenty-four or so—advanced into the room and stood blinking across the table, his hands straight at his sides and his fingers moving uneasily as if he held something in the palms. His face was very white and contrasted to its disadvantage with the long black hair swept back from his forehead.

He threw his hat and coat into a chair. But he said nothing. And as Monsieur Jacques studied him curiously he noticed that he looked hungry and ill; even the eyes, blazing as they appeared with fire, were sunken and drawn under the thick black brows.

"I wish you'd sit down," Monsieur Jacques said. In a way the boy's face was vaguely familiar, but Monsieur Jacques swept the thought aside. Nevertheless, he felt that he had been brought into touch with calamity. There was something ruffled and unusual about the youth that suggested calamity.

"You—know—me?" the youth asked quietly.

Monsieur Jacques adjusted his monocle, peered at him a little and hesitated.

"I don't think——" he began.

"Oh, don't quibble! . . . I'm Louis."

"Louis!"

Monsieur Jacques drew back a little towards the window.

"Yes, Louis I said."

"I'm very glad——"

"Oh, don't lie! I'm not in the mood for lies. I've lived on lies. . . . What do you think I'm here for?"

He came to the table and leaned across it and sent a sheaf of papers flying with his fist.

"What do you think I'm here for?" he repeated.

"Really, my dear Louis," Monsieur Jacques said very calmly, "I haven't the first idea."

"I think that I've come here to kill you!"

Without a word Monsieur Jacques went to the sideboard, dug in his trouser pocket for his keys and unlocked the tantalus.

"Have a brandy-and-soda," he said. "And for heaven's sake sit down. I've a queer sense of discomfort which torments me horribly when anyone visiting me remains standing."

"I suppose you think I'm mad?" Louis said, groping for a chair and dropping into it without removing his eyes from Monsieur Jacques.

"No, dear boy. Only a fool to talk like that. People don't walk into decent men's rooms at this late hour and talk about killing them. Believe me, it isn't done."

"Decent men's rooms!"

"Yes. That was what I said." Monsieur Jacques closed the tantalus with a snap. He crossed over to the fire, his hands in his pockets.

"Decent men's rooms! And you, my father, who was never married to my mother! Decent men's rooms!"

"Isn't it a little undignified to talk like that since—since your mother—is dead?" asked Monsieur Jacques

"But the wrong you did to her lives on, the other retorted. "I stand for that wrong And the vengeance of men, the just vengeance, has fallen, not upon you to whom the burden rightly belongs, but upon me. That's why I'm here!"

"What do you mean by vengeance?"

"The taint of illegitimacy—I've fought against it, but it's got me down. It's beaten me. It's not so long ago that I discovered the truth and I've been looking for you ever since. I waited for this meeting, lived for it."

"If you had not run from shelter——" Monsieur Jacques began.

"You mean—if I had not disappeared nine years ago?"

"Yes. You were approaching manhood and you were sensitive to hurt. I wanted to protect you."

"I didn't want molly-coddling, if that's what you mean. I wanted to play a decent part in life. But I did not know the stigma under which I lived. I got a job and kept it. I worked. I was going uphill; I meant to go uphill. Then one day someone discovered something. I was flung out. . . . Once again I started, but my work kept me in the same circle and in the end the same thing was repeated. And all the friends I cared about just dropped me outside their smug little lives. . . That's your work."

"I suppose I ought to have told you. I suppose——" Monsieur Jacques hesitated and stood looking away and pulling at his beard. "I suppose there is no more difficult task in the world than to tell a boy of sixteen that he is illegitimate, that he must ever shirk discussion of his parentage. I felt that For parentage is the escutcheon of a boy of sixteen."

"You mean that you were afraid to tell me?"

"Yes, Louis. I was afraid to tell you."

"That's pretty rank cowardice, isn't it? The sort of low-down trick I might have expected of a man like you, now that I know everything."

Monsieur Jacques flinched a little under the sting, but he was perfectly calm.

"If I had told you it would not have held you back, Louis. You meant to go. You were always restless, moody; suppressed energy trying to force through its barrier. I believed that you would have been stronger, better equipped by the lack of knowledge . . You didn't understand the world then, Louis."

"No, by God! And I've paid for it ever since. Wherever I went the truth struck me down. And there was no lack of proof, for the husband of my mother—God pity her!—was living. I know he drove her to the streets. I learned all about that. It made it more hideous. And you coming along, the destroyer, stamping out what little chance she might have had to rise again!"

Monsieur Jacques held up his hand.

"Say what you like about me," he exclaimed. "But be faithful to the memory of your mother. Some of the last words

she said were: 'Look after Louis.' And you robbed me of the chance by disappearing till now."

A patch of flame appeared on the boy's cheeks. He sprang to his feet.

"I'm glad!" he exclaimed passionately. "To have been brought up by you—God! the idea makes me sick! And I've been haunted by the viciousness of you ever since I went. Isn't that enough without having it plastered over me by living under your charge? They've never reckoned me fit for decent society—thanks to you!"

Monsieur Jacques did not stir.

"Sit down, Louis. And, Louis——"

The youth remained staring at him.

"Just put that thing which you hold in your hand in your pocket out here on the table."

Louis' eyes blazed, but he did not stir.

"Put it on the table!" Monsieur Jacques roared at him. "In this room you obey me!"

Slowly Louis withdrew his hand from the pocket of his reefer coat and put a small glimmering revolver on the table. For a few seconds Monsieur Jacques smoked on, glancing now at Louis and now at the revolver. He let the revolver lie between them, but presently he stepped across and picked it up and, emptying the chambers, put the cartridges between the paws of the orange china dog asprawl on the mantelpiece.

"At any rate, I've done you one good turn in my life," he said. "You would have felt very uncomfortable when you had killed me. Hanging is a pretty cheap kind of death."

"No worse than living in hell!" Louis flung back.

"You have been unfortunate, Louis. You have been a fool," Monsieur Jacques said. "Let us for the sake of argument put it like that. And it would have been easier—very much easier—if you had let me make it so. I would have stood by you. I'd planned all sorts of things for you, Louis. And you alone forbade fulfilment. Sit down!"

Louis dropped inert into the chair. Then his head slipped forward into his hands. He was shivering.

"You talking about decent treatment. Preaching like the proud father. Dear Heaven!" he exclaimed without looking up.

Monsieur Jacques set his lips. His fingers played coolly with the ribbon of his monocle.

"Did you ever know your mother to have one unhappy moment through me?" he asked.

"I don't remember."

The boy's head went back to the corner of the chair and his face, upturned so that the light fell full upon it, was wet with sweat.

"But you *know!*"

"I don't remember, I tell you!"

Monsieur Jacques hesitated.

"I loved your mother," he said quietly and in a voice of tenderness that was changed and unlike himself. "I loved her. I worship her memory now."

"Love! Worship! It's been pretty wonderful as a heritage for me, hasn't it?"

"Louis, you cannot understand these things. You have been outside the call of them all." Monsieur Jacques lounged heavily against the corner of the table. He pitched his half-smoked cigarette into the grate irritably and locked his fingers across his knee. And he looked away beyond Louis' head to the blank space of hideous wallpaper, till presently his face lighted as if a screen had been lifted and showed him things he had almost forgotten.

"I don't think I want to understand," Louis said. "It's all very sordid and terrible. And I hate recollections of ugly things."

"But you have never known love," Monsieur Jacques responded.

"Not your sort of love, thank God!"

"I mean love that is beautiful," Monsieur Jacques corrected. "Our love was beautiful—hers and mine. And what do you know of love like that? You judge everything from the standpoint of sex. And sex—what do you know of sex? What do any of us really know of sex in its relation to that which is beautiful in our lives! Sex has been beating against humanity through the centuries. It's a great surging tide, a human suffering. Sometimes we think we can push it aside, but we never do. But you can make of sex a very beautiful thing. And it can make a very beautiful thing of you."

Monsieur Jacques hesitated.

"I think she would have liked me to tell you," he went on. "When your mother was passing she said very quietly and the words were broken: 'It was

sunlight when you came. And, being small, I was always afraid of the dark . . .' Louis, a woman who regrets never says those things."

Louis turned a little in his chair.

"I didn't know she felt—like that," he said. "Because she—she wasn't quite a good woman."

"People might say—she wasn't a very good woman," Monsieur Jacques replied. "They might say she was a very beautiful weed. But human standards are so hard for the exceptions, Louis."

Louis sat very still, his eyes half closing, as if he were trying to remember something, to arrange a perspective that had become distorted.

"I wonder why you speak of her like that," he said. "As a weed."

"A weed, dear Louis, was the only flower that blossomed in my window-box last summer. The heat killed the plants I set so true to root and had nurtured so carefully. But the weed survived the blaze and put forth a beautiful pink flower as a token of courage. . . . And she was very beautiful, Louis."

The boy nodded.

"Yes," he said. "I remember."

And so for an hour—two hours—they talked. All the storm that had come between them fell away as the heart steals out of the tempest with the break of morning. They talked at first as people rather restrained, as if they each sheltered some hurt. But presently a companionship, or the essence of understanding, seemed suddenly to become present—an understanding that was neither the effort of the one nor the other. In the quiet of the room an influence moved that brought them together.. . . . Once Louis turned round as if he thought someone was standing behind his chair.

"You know," Monsieur Jacques said at last, in a tone that would brook no contradiction, "this country is all wrong about memorials. There is only one memorial to put up to those we love and that is life. Preservation of life; kindliness to life. Not massed charity, but something individual. At least I always look at it that way. And, tell me, these weeds, these human weeds, upon whom good women look down, good women who have never been tempted, never driven—would you say that a stone stuck anywhere in the ground is all they have earned? They have paid with tears; have they no claim to rather special remembrance?"

"I think *she* had," replied Louis. "I remember the things she used to say to me when I was small to make me brave. They were different, somehow, to the things one reads about. When I was a nipper I remember her telling me always to choose the hard road because it made the feet hard. To my kid's mind that sounded like horse-sense."

Monsieur Jacques leant forward from his perch.

"Louis," he said. "Don't you *know* that there was never a woman in this world quite like your mother?"

"She was the only memory I have worth keeping."

"A memory that ought to go on for years. I might say for hundreds of years."

"Which, of course, is impossible."

"No, Louis, I have built a memorial to your mother and endowed it so that it will go on for hundreds of years."

"A memorial?"

"Yes. I have collected two hundred and eight children as a memorial to her. I know she would have wanted that."

Louis stared at him. He wondered if this were some sudden freak of eccentricity, or if the grief, which he realised now was a living thing in the soul of Monsieur Jacques, had turned his head.

"Two hundred and eight——"

"Children. Weeds, Louis, weeds. Children who have had to rough it before they had the strength of a common beetle. Little kids. Children of mothers who'd been tempted and——"

"I know," said Louis. His face brightened. "It's rather a topping idea. I didn't know——"

"What?" asked Monsieur Jacques as he paused.

"I mean—I didn't know—you were—well, quite that sort of man."

"But then, Louis, you were so foolish. Hopping off like Spring-heeled Jack before you'd had time to understand me, and I you." He got up and put his hands on the boy's shoulders. "If we'd been together we would have built a memorial to your mother that would have moved the world. But I've had to do it alone. It's been a lonely job; too big for a man who's discovering little unexpected bouts of pain. My dissolute youth, Louis, that's what has done it! I lived a very dissolute youth

because I had money and no occupation. If you know of another man who has no occupation go on your knees at night and pray for him. . . . We'll go down there to-morrow."

"Where?"

"To your mother's memorial. The place we're constructing to her. It's not a marble mausoleum, no fanciful decoration, no blatant sorrow in extravagance. None of that. I've hidden all that in trees. A wonderful building. Tudor, Louis, Tudor. A knight once lived there, in fact the rapscallion built it for his ladies! Odd that it should become a palace for the children who are the descendants of those ladies. You can imagine the vicious old rascal wondering how he could build something that would entice the heart of a woman, and the gods laughing in the knowledge that years on, long after the old rascal's dust had joined the forgotten things of the world, other women, as beautiful as his, would come there and find treasure in the knowledge of motherhood! What a jest of the gods! Think of it! And the greater God laughing!"

Louis stared at him agape.

"Are you running a home or a hostel for incurables, or what?"

Monsieur Jacques smilingly shook his head.

"A place where they capture youth," he said. "Youth is so fleeting unless one looks after it. It's a big nursery, this place, where mothers come—those mothers whom God blessed without their asking for it and who do not know the wonderful thing they've got till we teach them. Every woman rediscovers herself through motherhood, Louis. There's no Columbus business about it, with limited frontiers. It's bigger than that. It's like getting all the world clutched in your arms. To me it's a splendid experiment; like watching ants come out of the depths of the earth in the sun and think they've conquered a garden. . . . I watch them change, these mothers. I watch them hate the old things. I watch the broken ships come home."

"You mean you rescue these children?"

"Yes. And through the children, those who brought them into the world. But wait till you've seen the place. It's something to dream about. A most amazing garden, with ponds and goldfish. Children love goldfish. At least, I thought they did. And the garden—it took five hundred years to grow it. But it takes an age to be worthy of youth."

"But if," began Louis haltingly, "you've got a place like that, why on earth do you live in this pokey hole? You're not a pauper."

Monsieur Jacques laughed till the monocle hobbed about on his chest.

"I once knew a man who lived in Charing Cross Road because he collected books," he said.

Louis nodded, as if he understood. But there was a vague expression on his face.

"I always sit at my open window here," Monsieur Jacques added, as if by an afterthought of explanation.

Louis still stared at him. Again the allusion had failed.

"You are terribly dense, Louis," Monsieur Jacques said. "Unnaturally dense. But then, you see, *you are not my son!*"

The following day Monsieur Jacques and Louis travelled a long journey by train into the heart of the country. And all the while Monsieur Jacques chatted at random about the most inconsequent things—the approach of winter, the shortage of butter, the drop in oil shares and the futility of Parliamentary Committees. But never once did he refer to the conversation of the previous evening.

At the station a car met them and took them to the heart of a wood. It drew up at a big iron gate and they got out.

"I like these gates, Louis," said Monsieur Jacques. "They are Italian. I bought them at Genoa and brought them here on a ship I chartered for the purpose. That rising sun coming out of a cloud-bank—rather a remarkable idea in iron, I think—appealed to me. It is so hard to be original in iron. . . . The stained windows I got at the same time. They are fifteenth century. You'll see them in the schoolroom. Rather imaginative. In a way they are quite remarkable. I think they must be, for I was offered nine thousand pounds for them only a short time ago."

"You mean you put windows like that in a schoolroom?"

"And why not? Youth must have the most beautiful things," Monsieur Jacques said as if stating a dogma. He lapsed into silence. Not till they reached the carved door of the building and stood in the porch did he speak again. Then he said:

"I would hate anything tawdry, any

suggestion of what had been. . . . Only the ancient Greeks understood youth."

He held open the door for Louis and followed him in. They walked down the tiled passage side by side. And everywhere was richness, with wonderful carpets that ended in snug dormitories and cubicles with saxe-blue hangings. The light of an autumn sun came through the windows weakly and scattered the colour in rich pools on the floor and flung warmth across the little beds through the orange curtains at the windows.

"I always have the curtains changed on the thirtieth of October," Monsieur Jacques explained. "We are pink in summer and in winter we just borrow from the sun with orange. A decent old fellow, the sun. Bait him with orange when he's wobbly, Louis. Bait him with orange! He's a surly old devil, but he's got a soul."

They wandered aimlessly about for half an hour, then Monsieur Jacques paused at the end of a corridor on the first floor and looked out through the mullioned windows to the lawn beyond.

For a while he gazed thoughtfully at the blank patch of grass, his eyes half closed, till at last Louis thought he slept. But suddenly he pulled himself up with a jerk and said:

"I wish you'd go down and see the children. The two hundred and eight bricks in your mother's mausoleum. I'd rather you went alone."

"Of course I'll go. But won't you come?" Louis asked. "I think perhaps—but may be it's just guesswork—the children would like it."

Monsieur Jacques seemed not to hear.

"That deodar there," he said, and pointed across the great lawn. He stood with one foot up on the locker beneath the window and his elbow resting on his knee. "That deodar—it made me buy this place."

"You bought it because of one tree?" Louis was a little incredulous.

"Yes, because of one tree. It was just like that at Errington. The deodar was exactly in that position. You remember she used to sit under it when the days were hot . . . And the bees were there—where those laurels are. You see I've had hives put there; the bigger children tend them. . . . And that patch to the right, in the break between the trees. That's where she used to put your cradle in the sun. You see I've had a sun-dial put there. She said that on the day you were born July was weeping, but your coming brought the sun and she never knew winter afterwards. . . . That's what she thought of you, Louis."

"I don't understand," said Louis. "I'm silly, but I don't understand."

"You don't understand? No. I suppose you wouldn't. Only God understands why I say these things. He knows."

"Not that. Not quite that," said Louis. "But you told me only a few hours ago that you were not my father and yet you know. . . ."

Monsieur Jacques glanced at him for an instant.

"She only told one person, Louis. They were the secrets of her soul. She told me. Now, perhaps, you know—oh, I don't know if you could really understand—why I loved your mother. No, perhaps one has to live these things. . . . Go down and see the children. They'll amuse you. . . . And I would like to stay here a little by myself. . . . I'm rather tired. . . . I think perhaps we shall have rain."

IV

A MONTH later Monsieur Jacques, sitting beside his open window in the boarding house, went to sleep, as it might have been in the cool of the evening, and forgot to wake up. Louis found him so when he came with the evening paper, his little tubby form leaning low over the window-sill, as if the eyes that no longer saw were watching the turmoil of life in the street below.

The boarders when they heard it gathered together, rather like a huddled flock of sheep, inside the dining-room door as the dinner gong sounded and moved to their places with a stiff attitude of melancholy. They spoke in whispers, some a little afraid. And they ate the meal quietly, speaking now and then in tones conscious of happening — happening that had, unsought, impinged upon them.

"I thuppose," began Miss Flannery to her neighbour, "that thimple people are alwayth retherved. I thought it wath tho with Monsieur Jacques. . . ." She spooned her soup noisily. "I mean, Monsieur Jacques wath—— Oh, that beathly cook hath burned the thoup!"

"Soup, my dear Miss Flannery, was

created to be burned. To be strictly accurate, it was a discovery made in the Garden when Adam, engaged in more tender things, burned the dish-water. That is the history of soup in a tureen!" And the major carefully uncorked his bottle of sherry.

Miss Flannery gave a little gurgle that might have been a laugh.

"It ith not about the thoup I wath thinking, but Monsieur Jacques. I thought I thaw him in the doorway ath we came in. Imagination, of courth."

"Of course," said the major. "You're jumpy, my dear. Nerves. You've got to whack nerves. Nerves are hell. Hell, Miss Flannery. We lost 'em in the army. Buried 'em. Buried 'em slick under. . . . Try the jelly when we come to it. It looks bilious, but I think it might be nice. The sideboard suits its complexion. And possibly the custard is unburnt. If so, God save the ruddy cook!"

"I hate jelly. Cold and wobbly," Miss Flannery replied. "I thuppose we didn't mithjudge him? I mean Monsieur Jacques. That thrange youth thaid the little man wath too good for thith place. The thauce! He wath going to take him away."

"Let him!" the major retorted. "I hate plumes and hearses. Let him."

"I think tho. But I would like to know—to be thure—that we didn't mithjudge him . . . I think he muth have been a very weak man."

"Weak. Jehoshaphat! You know, I do know men! I've ruled 'em, my dear. Ruled 'em. Like iron. Hell and firewater and the King's Regulations! . . . Keep an eye on the jelly."

In the small blue room kept for very special visitors in the Tudor house, Louis watched beside the little crumpled figure of what had once been Monsieur Jacques. He found himself in a room silent with death, that yet seemed stirred with the greatest magic of life. Sunshine blazed, a bird sang in the larches beyond the window the last lament of a lost summer. Somewhere a lone bee droned on a window-pane.

Some foolish person had placed a clock on the mantelpiece. As if time, or the count of time, could ever mean anything to Monsieur Jacques again!

Louis turned at last, conscious that he was not alone in the room. And he looked across the coffin at Alice Royds. Her face was white and tired, but what he noticed above everything was the unnecessary mourning she wore. He felt unconsciously that it would have hurt Monsieur Jacques very much if for one moment his weary eyes could have opened.

"I felt I must come up," she said, surveying Louis a little uncertainly. "I wanted to. I hoped——"

"Hoped for what?"

"I hoped I should be alone. I had only been alone with him once before. I wanted to talk to him; tell him things." She smiled weakly, believing that he might have thought her foolish. "I suppose it was just sentiment. No more than that. I felt somehow that he still lived."

A burst of children's laughter came from the lawn below.

"He is still alive!" Louis said significantly.

"Those children don't know what they've lost."

"But you know what he ordered. The children were to have a day's holiday and a gorgeous tea, because one of themselves had been fortunate enough to set out on the greatest of adventures. So he put it."

"I know. Yes, I know all about that. He was rather wonderful."

"And I never knew how wonderful till I first heard those children laugh."

"But I hate it!" she exclaimed. "When he did so much for them."

"He wanted it so," Louis replied. "You know that. He wanted every child to realise that there is nothing to be afraid of in death. It was his great desire to tone down the conception of death in a child's mind, so that it appeared as no more than an ordinary happening. . . . Fancy our trying to live up to that!"

"We couldn't do it, Louis."

"Not you and I. We've been weak. But we thought we were giants once."

"Yes. We thought."

"And I wanted to kill him. I've never told you about that. I thought him a despicable little person. I wanted to hurl his tubby body out of the window. And yet—I don't know how—he carried me away by something he said. He didn't preach, but he taught me in one hour to understand humanity."

"As he taught me," she broke in.

"It was like being taken round a picture gallery and being shown the most beautiful

aspects of humanity in rich colours," he told her. "He hypnotised me. That's what he did. Hypnotised me. And never let go."

Alice Royds bent her face over the sleeping eyes of Monsieur Jacques. And when she lifted her hand Louis saw that she held in it a small bunch of wild flowers. No, weeds. Weeds with little pink eyes and bits of white and yellow blossom. Very carefully she put the bouquet on his pillow.

"He had always seemed to me, till I really knew him, such a little man," she explained as if to cover her action.

Louis sat down on a trestle and watched her. The piteousness of her offering held him silent. He felt drawn towards her. He felt as if he would gladly carry her burden for her as Monsieur Jacques had carried it.

"And I remember all the things I wanted to do to him," he said, looking away from her. "Because I thought he'd hurt my mother. But I was all wrong. Really he had saved her from a pentecost of suffering and made her life very beautiful. No. He didn't marry her. He couldn't. But when one loves deeply, I wonder—if it matters. I don't know. . . ."

"If a man makes a woman's life beautiful," she began. "And if there's a God—He'd pick the secret out of the woman's heart. He'd know. It is men who would let women down at the Judgment Seat."

"I'm glad you think that way. It may not be true convention. . . . And, you know, he wasn't my father really."

"Not your father?" She came round to the trestle. "Not your father? Louis, I didn't know."

"No. My mother wasn't quite good till he made her good. Moralists will say that his doctrine was all wrong. I don't care. He made my mother good. You see, Alice, there are some men—a very few men—who make women very beautiful. Many men have the chance, but few take it when it comes. Mostly they trade on the ugliness. But he was more than a little kind. His love made him kind. He took her burden and he gave me his name. That's why I hate myself; I went back on him. Unknowing, it is true. But I went back on him."

They stayed there for a while, talking across the still figure that separated them, exchanging confidences, hopes, beliefs. May be that in their ordering this was to be the one chosen place in which they were to exchange beliefs. And he spoke to her with a natural ease, as if he had assumed the right to guard her, as if by some heritage he had stepped into the place of another.

"I wonder what you'll put on his stone," she said to fill in a pause.

"He hated stones," Louis said. "I don't know. Just the name and date, I suppose."

"Yes. Plain. He'd want it plain." She got up. "But I remember something he once told me. I remember now how frightened I was when he said it; somehow I thought he was mad. He told me what he would like on his stone if he died that night."

"He told you?"

"Yes."

"What was it?"

"Just these words, '*He was always kind to women.*'"

"He meant it?"

"Yes, Louis. It was his creed."

"I know," he said. He pulled a slip of paper from his pocket and jotted it down.

"It's your tribute to him that bit of memory," he said thoughtfully. "Alice, we'll put that." He smiled gratefully. "Yes, I think we'll put that."

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THIS royal throne of kings, this sceptre'd isle,
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
This other Eden, demi-paradise;
This fortress built by Nature for herself
Against infection and the hand of war;
This happy breed of men, this little world,
This precious stone set in the silver sea,
Which serves it in the office of a wall,
Or as a moat defensive to a house,
Against the envy of less happier lands.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE.

WE must be free or die, who speak the tongue
That Shakespeare spake; the faith and morals hold
Which Milton held.—In everything we are sprung
Of Earth's first blood, have titles manifold.

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH.

LOVE thou thy land, with love far brought
From out the storied Past, and used
Within the Present, but transfused
Thro' future time by power of thought.

True love turn'd round on fixed poles,
Love, that endures not sordid ends,
For English natures, freemen, friends,
Thy brothers and immortal souls.—

ALFRED TENNYSON.

NOBLY, nobly, Cape Saint Vincent to the North-west died away;
Sunset ran, one glorious blood-red, reeking into Cadiz Bay;
Bluish 'mid the burning water, full in face Trafalgar lay;
In the dimmest North-east distance dawned Gibraltar, grand and gray;
"Here and here did England help me; how can I help England?"—say,
Whoso turns as I, this evening, turn to God to praise and pray,
While Jove's planet rises yonder, silent over Africa.—

ROBERT BROWNING.

BRING me my Bow of burning gold!
Bring me my Arrows of desire!
Bring me my Spear! O clouds, unfold!
Bring me my Chariot of fire!

I will not cease from Mental Fight,
Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand,
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green and pleasant land.

WILLIAM BLAKE.

The Well

Every human action has its Nemesis

By W. W. JACOBS

TWO men stood in the billiard-room of an old country house, talking. Play, which had been of a half-hearted nature, was over and they sat at the open window, looking out over the park stretching away beneath them, conversing idly.

"Your time's nearly up, Jem," said one at length, "this time six weeks you'll be yawning out your honeymoon and cursing the man—woman I mean—who invented them."

Jem Benson stretched his long limbs in the chair and grunted in dissent.

"I've never understood it," continued Wilfred Carr, yawning. "It's not in my line at all; I never had enough money for my own wants, let alone for two. Perhaps if I were as rich as you or Crœsus I might regard it differently."

There was just sufficient meaning in the latter part of the remark for his cousin to forbear replying to it. He continued to gaze out of the window and to smoke slowly.

"Not being as rich as Crœsus—or you," resumed Mr. Carr, regarding him from beneath lowered lids, "I paddle my own canoe down the stream of Time and, tying it to my friends' doorposts, go in to eat their dinners."

"Quite Venetian," said Jem Benson, still looking out of the window. "It's not a bad thing for you, Wilfred, that you have the doorposts and dinners—and friends."

Mr. Carr grunted in his turn. "Seriously, though, Jem," he said slowly, "you're a lucky fellow, a very lucky fellow. If there is a better girl above ground than Olive I should like to see her."

"Yes," said the other quietly.

"She's such an exceptional girl," continued Carr, staring out of the window. "She's so good and gentle. She thinks you are a bundle of all the virtues."

He laughed frankly and joyously, but the other man did not join him.

"Strong sense of right and wrong, though," continued Carr, musingly. "Do you know, I believe that if she found out that you were not——"

"Not what?" demanded Benson, turning upon him fiercely, "Not what?"

"Everything that you are," returned his cousin with a grin that belied his words, "I believe she'd drop you."

"Talk about something else," said Benson slowly; "your pleasantries are not always in the best taste."

Wilfred Carr rose and, taking a cue from the rack, bent over the board and practised one or two favourite shots. "The only other subject I can talk about just at present is my own financial affairs," he said slowly, as he walked round the table.

"Talk about something else," said Benson again, bluntly.

"And the two things are connected," said Carr and, dropping his cue, he half sat on the table and eyed his cousin.

There was a long silence. Benson pitched the end of his cigar out of the window and, leaning back, closed his eyes.

"Do you follow me?" enquired Carr at length.

Benson opened his eyes and nodded at the window. "Do you want to follow my cigar?" he demanded.

"I should prefer to depart by the usual way for your sake," returned the other, unabashed. "If I left by the window all sorts of questions would be asked and you know what a talkative chap I am."

"So long as you don't talk about my affairs," returned the other, restraining himself by an obvious effort, "you can talk yourself hoarse."

"I'm in a mess," said Carr slowly, "a devil of a mess. If I don't raise fifteen hundred by this day fortnight I may be getting my board and lodging free."

"Would that be any change?" questioned Benson.

"The quality would," retorted the other. "The address also would not be good.

Seriously—, Jem, will you let me have the fifteen hundred ? "

" No," said the other simply.

Carr went white. " It's to save me from ruin," he said thickly.

" I've helped you till I'm tired," said Benson, turning and regarding him, " and it is all to no good. If you've got in a mess, get out of it. You should not be so fond of giving autographs away."

" It's foolish, I admit," said Carr, deliberately. " I won't do so any more. By the way, I've got some to sell. You needn't sneer. They're not my own."

" Whose are they ? " enquired the other.

" Yours."

Benson got up from his chair and crossed over to him. " What is this ? " he asked quietly. " Blackmail ? "

" Call it what you like," said Carr. " I've got some letters for sale, price fifteen hundred. And I know a man who wants to buy them at that price for the mere chance of getting Olive from you. I'll give you first offer."

" If you have got any letters bearing my signature you will be good enough to give them to me," said Benson very slowly.

" They're mine," said Carr lightly; " given to me by the lady you wrote them to. I must say that they are not all in the best possible taste."

His cousin reached forward suddenly and, catching him by the collar of his coat, pinned him down on the table.

" Give me those letters," he breathed, sticking his face close to his.

" They're not here," said Carr, struggling. " I'm not a fool. Let me go or I'll raise the price."

The other man raised him from the table in his powerful hands, apparently with the intention of dashing his head against it. Then suddenly his hold relaxed as an astonished-looking maidservant entered the room with letters. Carr sat up hastily.

" That's how it was done," said Benson, for the girl's benefit, as he took the letters.

" I don't wonder at the other man making him pay for it, then," said Carr blandly.

" You will give me those letters ? " said Benson, suggestively, as the girl left the room.

" At the price I mentioned, yes," said Carr; " but so sure as I'm a living man, if you lay your clumsy hands on me again I'll double it. Now, I'll leave you for a time while you think it over."

He took a cigar from the box and lighting it, carefully quitted the room. His cousin waited until the door had closed behind him and then, turning to the window, sat there in a fit of fury as silent as it was terrible.

The air was fresh and sweet from the park, heavy with the scent of new-mown grass. The fragrance of a cigar was now added to it and, glancing out, he saw his cousin pacing slowly by. He rose and went to the door and then apparently altering his mind, returned to the window and watched the figure of his cousin as it moved slowly away into the moonlight. Then he rose again and, for a long time, the room was empty.

It was empty when Mrs. Benson came in some time later to say good-night to her son on her way to bed. She walked slowly round the table and, pausing at the window gazed from it in idle thought, until she saw the figure of her son advancing with rapid strides to the house. He looked up at the window.

" Good-night," said she.

" Good-night," said Benson in a deep voice.

" Where is Wilfred ? "

" Oh, he has gone," said Benson.

" Gone ? "

" We had a few words; he was wanting money again and I gave him a piece of my mind. I don't think we shall see him again."

" Poor Wilfred ! " sighed Mrs. Benson. " He is always in trouble of some sort. I hope that you were not too hard upon him."

" No more than he deserved," said her son sternly. " Good-night."

II

THE well, which had long ago fallen into disuse, was almost hidden by the thick tangle of undergrowth which ran riot at that corner of the old park. It was partly covered by the shrunken half of a lid, above which a rusty windlass creaked in company with the music of the pines when the wind blew strongly. The full light of the sun never reached it and the ground surrounding it was moist and green when other parts of the park were gaping with the heat.

Two people walking slowly round the park in the fragrant stillness of a summer evening strayed in the direction of the well

"No use going through this wilderness, Olive," said Benson, pausing on the outskirts of the pines and eyeing with some disfavour the gloom beyond.

"Best part of the park," said the girl briskly; "you know it's my favourite spot."

"I know you're very fond of sitting on the coping," said the man slowly, "and I wish you wouldn't. One day you will lean back too far and fall in."

"And make the acquaintance of 'Truth,'" said Olive lightly. "Come along."

She ran from him and was lost in the shadow of the pines, the bracken crackling beneath her feet as she ran. Her companion followed slowly and, emerging from the gloom, saw her poised daintily on the edge of the well with her feet hidden in the rank grass and nettles which surrounded it. She motioned her companion to take a seat by her side and smiled softly as she felt a strong arm passed about her waist.

"I like this place," said she, breaking a long silence, "it is so dismal—so uncanny. Do you know, I wouldn't dare to sit here alone, Jem, I should imagine that all sorts of dreadful things were hidden behind the bushes and trees, waiting to spring out on me. Ugh!"

"You'd better let me take you in," said her companion tenderly; "the well isn't always wholesome, especially in the hot weather. Let's make a move."

The girl gave an obstinate little shake and settled herself more securely on her seat.

"Smoke your cigar in peace," she said quietly. "I am settled here for a quiet talk. Has anything been heard of Wilfred yet?"

"Nothing."

"Quite a dramatic disappearance, isn't it?" she continued. "Another scrape, I suppose, and another letter for you in the same old strain: 'Dear Jem, help me out.'"

Jem Benson blew a cloud of fragrant smoke into the air and, holding his cigar between his teeth, brushed away the ash from his coat sleeves.

"I wonder what he would have done without you," said the girl, pressing his arm affectionately. "Gone under long ago, I suppose. When we are married, Jem, I shall presume upon the relationship to lecture him. He is very wild, but he has his good points, poor fellow."

"I never saw them," said Benson, with startling bitterness. "God knows, I never saw them."

"He is nobody's enemy but his own," said the girl, startled by this outburst.

"You don't know much about him," said the other, shortly. "He was not above blackmail; not above ruining the life of a friend to do himself a benefit. A loafer, a cur and a liar!"

The girl looked up at him soberly but timidly and took his arm without a word and they both sat silent while evening deepened into night and the beams of the moon, filtering through the branches, surrounded them with a silver network. Her head sank upon his shoulder, till suddenly, with a sharp cry, she sprang to her feet.

"What was that?" she cried breathlessly.

"What was what?" demanded Benson, springing up and clutching her fast by the arm.

She caught her breath and tried to laugh. "You're hurting me, Jem."

His hold relaxed.

"What is the matter?" he asked gently. "What was it startled you?"

"I was startled," she said, slowly putting her hands on his shoulder. "I suppose the words I used just now are ringing in my ears, but I fancied that somebody behind us whispered, 'Jem, help me out.'"

"Fancy," repeated Benson and his voice shook; "but these fancies are not good for you. You—are frightened—at the dark and the gloom of these trees. Let me take you back to the house."

"No, I'm not frightened," said the girl, re-seating herself. "I should never be really frightened of anything when you were with me, Jem. I'm surprised at myself for being so silly."

The man made no reply, but stood, a strong dark figure, a yard or two from the well, as though waiting for her to join him.

"Come and sit down, sir," cried Olive, patting the brickwork with her small white hand, "one would think that you did not like your company."

He obeyed slowly and took a seat by her side, drawing so hard at his cigar that the light of it shone upon his face at every breath. He passed his arm, firm and rigid as steel, behind her, with his hand resting on the brickwork beyond.

"Are you warm enough?" he asked tenderly, as she made a little movement.

"Pretty fair," she shivered; "one

oughtn't to be cold at this time of the year, but there's a cold damp air comes up from the well."

As she spoke a faint splash sounded from the depths below and for the second time that evening she sprang from the well with a little cry of dismay.

"What is it now?" he asked in a fearful voice. He stood by her side and gazed at the well, as though half expecting to see the cause of her alarm emerge from it.

"Oh, my bracelet," she cried in distress, "my poor mother's bracelet. I've dropped it down the well."

"Your bracelet!" repeated Benson, dully. "Your bracelet? The diamond one?"

"The one that was my mother's," said Olive. "Oh, we can get it back, surely. We must have the water drained off."

"Your bracelet!" repeated Benson stupidly.

"Jem," said the girl in terrified tones, "dear Jem, what is the matter?"

For the man she loved was standing regarding her with horror. The moon which touched it was not responsible for all the whiteness of the distorted face and she shrank back in fear to the edge of the well. He saw her fear and, by a mighty effort, regained his composure and took her hand.

"Poor little girl," he murmured, "you frightened me. I was not looking when you cried and I thought that you were slipping from my arms, down—down——"

His voice broke and the girl, throwing herself into his arms, clung to him convulsively.

"There, there," said Benson, fondly, "don't cry, don't cry."

"To-morrow," said Olive, half-laughing, half-crying, "we will all come round the well with hook and line and fish for it. It will be quite a new sport.

"No, we must try some other way," said Benson. "You shall have it back."

"How?" asked the girl.

"You shall see," said Benson. "To-morrow morning at latest you shall have it back. Till then, promise me that you will not mention your loss to anyone. Promise."

"I promise," said Olive, wonderingly. "But why not?"

"It is of great value, for one thing, and—— But there—there are many reasons. For one thing, it is my duty to get it for you."

"Wouldn't you like to jump down for it?" she asked mischievously. "Listen."

She stooped for a stone and dropped it down.

"Fancy being where that is now," she said, peering into the blackness; "fancy going round and round like a mouse in a pail, clutching at the slimy sides, with the water filling your mouth and looking up to the little patch of sky above."

"You had better come in," said Benson, very quietly. "You are developing a taste for the morbid and horrible."

The girl turned and, taking his arm, walked slowly in the direction of the house; Mrs. Benson, who was sitting in the porch, rose to receive them.

"You shouldn't have kept her out so long," she said chidingly, "where have you been?"

"Sitting on the well," said Olive, smiling "discussing our future."

"I don't believe that place is healthy, said Mrs. Benson, emphatically. "I really think it might be filled in, Jem."

"All right," said her son slowly. "Pity it wasn't filled in long ago."

He took the chair vacated by his mother as she entered the house with Olive and, with his hands hanging limply over the sides, sat in deep thought. After a time he rose and, going upstairs to a room which was set apart for sporting requisites, selected a sea fishing line and some hooks and stole softly downstairs again. He walked swiftly across the park in the direction of the well, turning before he entered the shadow of the trees to look back at the lighted windows of the house. Then, having arranged his line, he sat on the edge of the well and cautiously lowered it.

He sat with his lips compressed, occasionally looking about him in a startled fashion, as though he half expected to see something peering at him from the belt of trees. Time after time he lowered his line until at length, in pulling it up, he heard a little metallic tinkle against the side of the well.

He held his breath then and, forgetting his fears, drew the line in inch by inch, so as not to lose its precious burden. His pulse beat rapidly and his eyes were bright. as the line came slowly in he saw the catch hanging to the hook and, with a steady hand, drew the last few feet in. Then he saw that instead of the bracelet he had hooked a bunch of keys.

With a faint cry he shook them from the hook into the water below and stood breathing heavily. Not a sound broke the stillness of the night. He walked up and down a bit and stretched his great muscles, then he came back to the well and resumed his task.

For an hour or more the line was lowered without result. In his eagerness he forgot his fears and, with eyes bent down the well, fished slowly and carefully. Twice the hook became entangled in something and was with difficulty released. It caught a third time and all his efforts failed to free it. Then he dropped the line down the well and, with head bent, walked towards the house.

He went first to the stables at the rear and then, retiring to his room, for some time paced restlessly up and down. Then, without removing his clothes, he flung himself upon the bed and fell into a troubled sleep

III

LONG before anybody else was astir he arose and stole softly downstairs. The sunlight was stealing in at every crevice and flashing in long streaks across the darkened rooms. The dining-room into which he looked struck chill and cheerless in the dark yellow light which came through the lowered blinds. He remembered that it had the same appearance when his father lay dead in the house; now, as then, everything seemed ghastly and unreal; the very chairs standing as their occupants had left them the night before seemed to be indulging in some dark communication of ideas.

Slowly and noiselessly he opened the hall door and passed into the fragrant air beyond. The sun was shining on the drenched grass and trees and a slowly vanishing white mist rolled like smoke about the grounds. For a moment he stood, breathing deeply the sweet air of the morning and then walked slowly in the direction of the stables.

The rusty creaking of a pump-handle and a spatter of water upon the red-tiled courtyard, showed that somebody else was astir and a few steps farther he beheld a brawny, sandy-haired man gasping wildly under severe self-infliction at the pump.

"Everything ready, George?" he asked quietly.

"Yes, sir," said the man, straightening up suddenly and touching his forehead. "Bob's just finishing the arrangements inside. It's a lovely morning for a dip. The water in that well must be just icy."

"Be as quick as you can," said Benson, impatiently.

"Very good, sir," said George, burnishing his face harshly with a very small towel which had been hanging over the top of the pump. "Hurry up, Bob,"

In answer to his summons a man appeared at the door of the stable with a coil of stout rope over his arm and a large metal candlestick in his hand.

"Just to try the air, sir," said George, following his master's glance, "a well gets rather foul sometimes, but if a candle can live down it, a man can."

His master nodded and the man hastily pulling up the neck of his shirt and thrusting his arms into his coat, followed him as he led the way slowly to the well.

"Beg pardon, sir," said George, drawing up to his side, "but you are not looking over and above well this morning. If you'll let me go down I'd enjoy the bath."

"No, no," said Benson, peremptorily.

"You ain't fit to go down, sir," persisted his follower. "I've never seen you look so before. Now, if——"

"Mind your business," said his master curtly.

George became silent and the three walked with swinging strides through the long wet grass to the well. Bob flung the rope on the ground and at a sign from his master handed him the candlestick.

"Here's the line for it, sir," said Bob, fumbling in his pockets.

Benson took it from him and slowly tied it to the candlestick. Then he placed it on the edge of the well and, striking a match, lit the candle and began slowly to lower it.

"Hold hard, sir," said George quickly, laying his hand on his arm, "you must tilt it or the string'll burn through."

Even as he spoke the string parted and the candlestick fell into the water below.

Benson swore quietly.

"I'll soon get another," said George, starting up.

"Never mind, the well's all right," said Benson.

"It won't take a moment, sir," said the other over his shoulder.

"Are you master here, or am I?" said Benson hoarsely.

George came back slowly, a glance at his master's face stopping the protest upon his tongue and he stood by watching him sulkily as he sat on the well and removed his outer garments. Both men watched him curiously as having completed his preparations he stood grim and silent with his hands by his side.

"I wish you'd let me go, sir," said George, plucking up courage to address him. "You ain't fit to go, you've got a chill or something. I shouldn't wonder it's the typhoid. They've got it in the village bad."

For a moment Benson looked at him angrily, then his gaze softened. "Not this time, George," he said quietly. He took the looped end of the rope and placed it under his arms and, sitting down, threw one leg over the side of the well.

"How are you going about it, sir?" queried George, laying hold of the rope and signing to Bob to do the same.

"I'll call out when I reach the water," said Benson; "then pay out three yards more quickly so that I can get to the bottom."

"Very good, sir," answered both.

Their master threw the other leg over the coping and sat motionless. His back was turned towards the men as he sat with head bent, looking down the shaft. He sat for so long that George became uneasy.

"All right, sir?" he inquired.

"Yes," said Benson slowly. "If I tug at the rope, George, pull up at once. Lower away."

The rope passed steadily through their hands until a hollow cry from the darkness below and a faint splashing warned them that he had reached the water. They gave him three yards more and stood with relaxed grasp and strained ears, waiting.

"He's gone under," said Bob in a low voice.

The other nodded and, moistening his huge palms, took a firmer grip of the rope.

Fully a minute passed and the men began to exchange uneasy glances. Then a sudden tremendous jerk followed by a series of feebler ones nearly tore the rope from their grasp.

"Pull!" shouted George, placing one foot on the side and hauling desperately. "Pull! pull! He's stuck fast; he's not coming; P—U—LL!"

In response to their terrific exertions the rope came slowly in, inch by inch, until at length a violent splashing was heard and at the same moment a scream of unutterable horror came echoing up the shaft.

"What a weight he is!" panted Bob. "He's stuck fast or something. Keep still, sir; for heaven's sake, keep still."

For the taut rope was being jerked violently by the struggles of the weight at the end of it. Both men, with grunts and sighs, hauled it in foot by foot.

"All right, sir," cried George cheerfully.

He had one foot against the well and was pulling manfully; the burden was nearing the top. A long pull and a strong pull and the face of a dead man with mud in the eyes and nostrils came peering over the edge. Behind it was the ghastly face of his master; but this he saw too late, for, with a great cry he let go his hold of the rope and stepped back. The suddenness overthrew his assistant and the rope tore through his hands. There was a frightful splash.

"You fool!" stammered Bob, and ran to the well helplessly.

"Run!" cried George. "Run for another line."

He bent over the coping and called eagerly down as his assistant sped back to the stables shouting wildly. His voice re-echoed down the shaft, but all else was silence.

MEN live best on little. Nature gives all men happiness if they only knew how to use it. CLAUDIAN.

To be happy give no cause for envy. The secret of happiness is to hide one's life. DE LA BOUISSE.

The Redemption of Jonas Eames

"The shame is in the crime, not in the punishment"

By W. J. LOCKE

JONAS EAMES cursed and hissed alternately as he rubbed the horse down. He was in the vilest of tempers. If the animal had not shown signs of blood, which inspired a certain respect, Jonas would have taken delight in kicking it with his heavy, wooden-soled boots. He had lounged late into the Blue Dragon and found that an unexpected traveller had arrived and that his horse was waiting to be groomed and stabled. This of itself would not have disturbed his equanimity; but Mrs. Settle, the hostess, had greeted him, on his appearance, with such a tornado of abuse as to cause even his mean blood to boil. Now Mrs. Settle was noted as a shrew for miles around and for miles around Jonas Eames was known to be one of the most worthless loafers in the three kingdoms. So when Mrs. Settle rated her stableman, the maids of the inn kept out of earshot.

In the midst of his work Jonas looked up and saw his mistress standing in the doorway of the stable. The light of the lantern slung on to the rack fell on her coarse, hard features and her stout and somewhat slatternly figure

"Oh, you're here again, are you?" said Jonas.

"Yes, I'm here again," retorted Mrs. Settle in a shrill voice. "And I'll keep on coming until I see that the gentleman's horse is properly stabled. And what's more, if you don't like the job you can leave it. I can get a score of properer men than you in Turrell any day."

"You wouldn't get another man to work for the wages you give me."

"No, it isn't likely," cried Mrs. Settle, with fine scorn. "No one but you is low enough to take it, you loafing, drunken good-for-nought. Everyone knows it is only out of charity that I keep you. If you had the spirit of a louse you wouldn't be living on charity in the house where you once were master."

"Leave that alone!" growled the man.

"Oh, indeed!" said Mrs. Settle contemptuously. "And who are you to tell me what to say and what to leave alone? Go on with your work and don't stand gaping at me like a drunken pig."

He obeyed, with an evil glance and the hostess moved slowly away.

"I'll cut her throat one of these days, if I swing for it," he muttered to himself.

He was a lean, foxy-faced man, with a shock of unkempt red hair and sharp, ignoble features. His back was covered with the remains of a coarse shirt and the greater rents in his breeches were drawn together with twine. Both garments were discoloured with the daily soil of several years. A sorry spectacle for one who had been the master in that very spot.

For the Blue Dragon had been owned by his grandfather and father before him; and they had both been thrifty men and had saved money and bought much property round about. So that when Jonas Eames and his twin brother Luke came into their inheritance on their father's death, there was a pretty fortune to be divided.

At first they carried on the business of the Blue Dragon together. But Jonas, ever dissolute and spendthrift, speedily drank, gambled and debauched away his share of the heritage and stood one day penniless and humbled before his brother. Now, as far as Jonas could love anything, he loved Luke. The mysterious bond of twinhood bound them together in spite of all differences of taste and character.

"We are not two, Jonas," said Luke. "We are one. It is a mere accident of birth that we are not one human being. So what is mine is yours."

It was a quaint standpoint, but he acted from it none the less. He had long been chafing at the inaction and seclusion of his life in the quiet country neighbourhood and pining for action in the great world. The second division of the property was his opportunity. The Blue Dragon, its

goodwill and a small stock of ready money he gave over to Jonas ; the rest he converted into cash and went with it to strange lands beyond the seas.

But Jonas, saved from disaster by his brother's quixotic love, had already sunk too low to profit by it. The Blue Dragon gradually went to rack and ruin. On the outskirts of the little West country town of Turrell and just one day's stage from the seaport of Kingsbridge, it used to receive a never-failing supply of guests and throve exceedingly. But as its fortunes waned, those of the White Hart in the High Street of the town grew brighter, until at last the latter gained all the regular custom, while the older house depended upon travellers who, in their ignorance and to their after regret, stopped at the first inn they came to.

At last it was put up for sale and bought by Mr. Settle, a stranger in those parts, under whose management its fame declined still further. Meanwhile Jonas drifted from bad to worse. Those whom he would have hunted from his courtyard with a dog-whip became his chosen associates. He was put in prison once for petty theft. He became the foul, vicious, drunken loafer at street corners, a by-word of disgust on all the country side. By taking him into her service Mrs. Settle by no means increased the fair repute of the Blue Dragon. Still, but for her he would have starved ; he knew it and hated her accordingly.

His task over, Jonas emerged into the courtyard, dimly lit by streaks of light from the inn windows. One of the maids was standing by the kitchen-door scraping out a saucepan. From the taproom at the further end came the sound of rough voices and laughter. A light in the best bedroom in the middle of the building showed that the new arrival had already retired. As soon as the maid saw Jonas she went in and re-appeared with a great hunk of bread covered with a slice of fat bacon.

" Your supper, Jonas."

He received it from her boorishly and began to eat. The girl took up the saucepan again.

" Who's yon ? " he asked, presently, jerking his clasp-knife upwards.

" A gentleman, to be sure," replied the girl, " and a proper one. An officer most likely from the wars. He has a great red scar all down his face."

" You mean a highwayman," growled Jonas. " King's officers don't come any more to the Blue Dragon."

The girl gave a little scream.

" La ! don't tell me that or I'll die of fright."

" You don't suppose you're in any danger, do you ? " said Jonas, with a sneer.

But Jonas being beneath contempt, the girl merely sniffed at the insinuation and went on calmly :

" I know he isn't a highwayman, for he came with a leather box behind his saddle and he wouldn't let anyone touch it. He said it was too heavy for us womenfolk to carry. And just now Joan looked through the key-hole and saw him lift a great, big bag of money out of it and weigh it in his hand."

" Which proves him to have come by it honestly," said Jonas.

And leaving the maid to digest the sarcasm, he turned on his heel and went away to bed.

He lived in the dilapidated cock-loft over the stables, a place smelling evilly of stale straw, decayed plaster and the manifold odours which drink, vile tobacco and filthiness manage to impart to a man's personal belongings. A heap of straw covered with dirty sacking formed his bed. A three-legged stool was the only other article of furniture. But the loft was littered with rusty spades and mattocks, ends of rope, heaps of old mildewed harness and worm-eaten boxes containing nothing but mustiness and black-beetles. The pitch of the roof was so low that a man could only stand upright in the middle of the floor. The door opened the whole height of the loft and was reached from the yard by a ladder.

Jonas finished his supper sitting on the threshold and dangling his legs. From this position he commanded an oblique view of the traveller's window, which was open, the night being warm. But though there was a light in the room, its occupier was apparently not stirring and all that Jonas could see was a picture on the side wall. Yet he gazed intently. The kitchen-maid's idle words had inspired within him vague suggestions which were gradually taking the form of a wild desire. He nursed it in his hatred of Mrs. Settle.

Here was an opportunity of getting away from his degrading slavery, from his mistress's curst tongue, from the detested walls of the Blue Dragon, from the loathing

and contempt of Turrell. To climb through that window when the man was asleep, possess himself of the heavy leathern box, ride away on the traveller's horse—it would be a simple matter. And then to be his own master again, to taste the wild joys of freedom—his nostrils dilated and his breath came quick at the thought.

But men did not travel alone with great sums of money without taking due precautions. Suppose the man slept with the money-bag under his pillow; suppose he awakened and sprang at him, pistol in hand. Jonas felt a queasiness at his heart. He neither loved danger nor longed for death. The plan was too desperate. He rose and shut himself into the darkness, abandoning the idea with a sigh. He refreshed himself from a bottle of Hollands that he kept in a secure hiding-place, undressed—that is to say, threw off his heavy boots, and lay down upon his bed.

He could not sleep. The thought of the stranger's money-bag set his brain on fire. If he closed his eyes showers of gold gleamed red before them. If he opened them the sockets seemed aflame. The hours passed. A fiery demon within him goaded him on to the attempt—at last conquered his cowardice. He rose and opened the door. The moon had risen and its light flooded the courtyard and the old gable-roofed inn and fell full upon the traveller's window. It was still open—seemed to invite him. The wide-swung lattice was like an arm held out in expectant welcome.

"I will look in," said Jonas to himself.

A few moments later he had carried the ladder across the courtyard and was standing with his arms on the sill, surveying the room.

The man was sleeping in the great four-poster, wrapped up to the head in the bedclothes, with his face turned away from the window. On a chair at the foot of the bed, clearly distinguishable in the moonlight, was the leather box. To Jonas's surprise he caught the glitter of the key in the lock. From the window to the treasure it was only five yards. Jonas thrust in his head and listened. The man's breathing was heavy and regular. He was sleeping soundly. With absolute quiet of movement success was certain. Jonas, barefooted, slipped into the room. He took a cautious step and looked around him. Then he noticed, what he had not seen from outside, a great horse-pistol, lying on the table on the further side of the bed, within reach of the sleeper's hand. For a moment the blood went from his cheeks and his knees knocked together. He sank on all fours and so crawled towards the leather box. He stretched out his hand to lift it. But it was heavy—too heavy to be carried with absolute noiselessness across the room and pass through the window. The sweat broke out on his forehead.

Then a ray of hope passed through him as he remembered the key. He turned it softly in the lock and lifted the long flat lid. Within the box, amid a quantity of papers and a few small articles of attire, were two great bags with the necks tied up with twine. His blood danced in his veins as he lifted them out on to the floor. Then carefully he began to search the box. His hand struck against something cold beneath the papers. He grasped it and drew it out. It was a long knife, evidently a curio of travel, such as he had never seen before, with a narrow two-edged blade and a gleaming haft that looked in the uncertain moonlight as if it might be gold. He was in the act of depositing it by the side of the bags when the blade knocked against the chair-rail with a clear sharp sound.

The sleeper moved uneasily in his bed and muttered a few words. The thief's heart stood still. He thought of the deadly-looking pistol and he clutched the handle of the knife. The sleeper coughed slightly. Jonas crouched at the bed-foot and prepared, if need were, to sell his life dearly. If the man rose he would spring at him and bury the knife in his breast. Silence again. The handle of the weapon fitted his grasp, seemed to caress his palm. His mind, once turned to murder, rested on the thought.

Why should he not kill him as he slept—make certain of his own escape from the room? His brain worked rapidly. If he killed him, took only one bag, left the other conspicuously in the open box, it would be evident to the authorities that robbery had not been the object of the murder. Suspicion would be diverted from himself. It would be surmised that some unknown enemy had tracked the stranger to the inn and had secretly accomplished his revenge. If he let him live he would be the first upon whom the suspicion of robbery would fall.

He began to creep silently round the bed.

A red cloud was before his eyes, a strange, fierce exultation in his heart. He lost sense of the object of his intended action. The lust of murder absorbed him.

He reached the side of the bed, rose to his feet and gripped the knife hard. Its long, tapering blade glittered in the moonlight. Only a patch of the traveller's face was visible between the night-cap and the counterpane and that patch was disfigured by a portion of a great raised scar. He was lying on his right side, with his left arm thrown forward. Only the counterpane and sheet covered him, as Jonas had ascertained, and these were drawn taut over his body.

¶

JONAS stood for a moment hesitating, with uplifted hand. Then suddenly he brought down the blade with the speed of lightning. A horrible jerk, two or three convulsive quivers through all the limbs, and then absolute stillness. The knife had been driven through the sleeper's heart. For some time Jonas remained motionless, staring like a man struck with catalepsy. Then he picked up the one bag, replaced the other in the box and sped through the window. Safe in his cock-loft again, with the ladder carefully replaced, Jonas sat down upon his bed, put the bag of money at his feet, wiped the cold sweat from his forehead and tried to realise what had happened.

Though his heart beat violently, he was quite free from terror or remorse. What mainly exercised his fancy was the exceeding simplicity of the deed. He pondered over it with a morbidly speculative interest. If he could only make sure of the place to strike, he could kill a camp of a hundred sleeping men—stabbing them stealthily one after another. The idea fascinated him. He grasped a broken whipstock that was lying on the bed and went through the movement of plunging it into a man's breast. The non-resistance of the flesh to the passage of the knife had surprised him. The blade had seemed to sink in like a trowel into wet mould. It had caused him an indefinable sensation which it fascinated him to recall.

For a long time man's blood had been upon his head without causing him a quiver in his sleep. But he had never seen the death of any one of his victims. They had been stray travellers concerning whose movements he had sold information to gentlemen of the road and if they had proved contumacious when bidden to stand and deliver and had been punished with a bullet through the head, it was none of his business. From which it may be gathered that Jonas Eames had attained that moral insensibility which is as indispensable to the comfort of the criminal as a delicately sensitive conscience is to that of the Christian gentleman. The blood-money had procured him much personal gratification in the way of strong waters and that was the end of the matter. But now he had killed a man with his own hand. " I could ha' done it again and again," he muttered, with a horrible pride.

His foot happened to touch the bag of money and the contact aroused him from his pre-occupation. What was he to do? Fly at once, on the stranger's horse, or hide the money in the cavity at the back of the mortise of the loosely-fitting beam, where he had already hidden many a squab-shaped bottle of smuggled Schiedam from the prying eyes of Mrs. Settle. He sat for a moment hesitating, while the thought of the gallows shook him. His flesh crept with an uncomfortable shiver and his throat became dry. Instinctively he reached out his hand for the bottle of Hollands. Two or three gulps restored his equanimity and set his wits at work. In a few moments he had decided. He would secrete the money cunningly, go to bed, drink himself helpless, as he had often done and sleep until he was awakened next morning. But first he must see to chance bloodstains on his hands or clothing and examine his treasure.

For this purpose he closed the open door of his loft and lit a stump of tallow-candle fixed by shapeless grease droppings in the mouth of a bottle. Satisfied by close personal scrutiny that he bore no traces of blood, he took up the bag of money with a throb of delight. It seemed heavier than when he had carried it from the dead man's room. Holding it by the neck with one hand, he felt with the other its bellying sides and a thrill passed through his finger-tips and stirred his heart. Two hundred pounds at least—a fortune to be spent in unimagined joys in some sea-port town miles and miles away from Turrell. He dallied with the pleasure of unholy anticipation.

At last he settled himself upon the bed, with the glaring candle by his side and the

bag between his knees and fumbled with the sealed twine around the neck. Then for the first time he noticed that a written label was fixed to the string. Out of curiosity he brought it to the light. But no sooner had his eyes fallen on the writing than it held them in a wide, amazed stare.

"For Mr. Jonas Eames."

Mistake was impossible. The words were traced in a round, clerkly hand.

A nameless fear seized upon him—the fear of the supernatural, the uncanny—the fear of the mysterious, terrible hand of Destiny. He quaked in superstitious terror. Again the sweat beaded on his forehead. His heart thumped like a thresher's flail against his sides. For a while he was too dizzy and stupefied to perceive the grim irony of the incident. When, at last, it dawned upon his scared senses that he had put his head in the gallows' noose just to obtain what was coming to him as a gift, his gorge rose with a sickening feeling of disgust. For a moment he cursed himself for not having taken the other bag. Perhaps that was meant for him, too. Or was it all some deep witchcraft that had suddenly summoned the label into being and was thus threatening him with unknown horrors?

He sat cross-legged on the bed, his elbows on his knees, gnawing at his great dirty fingers. There was the writing. "For Mr. Jonas Eames," staring him in the face. For the while the desire to open the bag had gone.

His thoughts went back to the murdered man. Who could he be—this stranger that had sought him out to bring him so immense a sum of money? His brain whirled in fruitless conjectures.

But suddenly, without a second's warning, a thought smote him with a crash that rolled through his ears like thunder. He sprang to his feet in terror and staggered to the wall, trembling like a man with ague.

How long he stood there, with frozen blood, he did not know. When he recovered power of sensation one wild irresistible impulse possessed him. He must look upon the dead man's face again, at all risks, at all costs. To live an hour longer with that awful surmise would drive him mad. He must return to the dead man's bedside, look upon his face, assure himself that the thought was a hideous fantasy.

With shaking limbs he advanced to the door and threw it open. It was dawn. The grey light filled the room. The morning air made him shiver as he paused for a moment on the threshold. Everything was deathly still, save for the rustle of some straw, caught by the breeze, upon the cobble-paved yard. All were sleeping in the silent, straggling old building—all save the man who was lying dead beyond that window, the solitary open one in the midst of the row of white blinds. A thrush swooped down and pecked at some grain in the yard; and then, looking up at the man standing in the doorway of the cockloft, with matted red hair above bloodshot eyes and ghastly features, took fright and flew away over the gables of the inn.

Jonas Eames, barefooted, as he had descended before, went down his ladder, shouldered it and again placed it by the open window. Until he had cleared the sill and was standing upon the floor of the room he dared not look towards the bed.

The first sight made him shudder. When he had left it, it had seemed spotless white. Now, over part of the covered form and the counterpane beside it, spread a great irregular patch, like a fantastic map of a dull red colour. And there on the top of the heap, gleamed the golden haft of a knife. Jonas advanced on tiptoe, holding his breath. Objects that had seemed vague and indistinct in the moonlight took sharp definition in the growing light of day. This very vividness of surrounding seemed to add a new cause for terror. The dead man's clothes thrown carelessly into the armchair, the yellow leather case at the foot of the bed, the silver tankard half-emptied on the table, the long horse-pistol he had dreaded a few hours before, the oaken press, the prints on the walls—all seemed to have started into awakened life and to be accusing him with silent tongues. And there, in the midst of that red stain on the bed, lay the most awful thing of all.

A few steps he made on tiptoe and then, with a wild rush, he went to the further side of the bed and, tearing the bedclothes from the face, peered down.

He fell back with a half-choking cry. In spite of the livid, convulsed features, further distorted by the great red scar from the hair-roots to the chin and the glazed blue eyes set in an awful stare, he recognised the man. His thought received hideous warrant. It was his brother.

For a long time he gazed at the dead

and then sank in a shuddering heap upon the ground. And God and the Devil fought for his soul. He writhed in a torture of horror. His own brother—the only being he had loved in his degraded life, bound to him by that strange blood-tie of twinhood that drew him only the more strongly through his superstitious ignorance! His own twin-brother—the lad around whose neck he had passed his arm, who had thought of him in lands afar and had come, with love in his heart, to share with him his fortune for a second time. It was horrible, a deed never to be forgiven. The pains of hell gat round about Jonas Eames. To his warped moral sense the slaying of an unknown human form had occasioned no twinge of remorse. On the contrary it had caused him a pleasurable sensation, gratifying to certain brute instincts and, among others, to his vanity. But the awful discovery worked a revolution in his soul.

After a while he lifted up a haggard face. The thought of the necessity of escape occurred to him. Mechanically he staggered to his feet. The sun had risen and the room was bathed in golden light. If he should fly it must be at once. But his eyes caught the dull glazed stare of his murdered brother and seemed to read in it a mute appeal. And then a strange thing happened. A thrill like the fanning of wings swept through his being, loosening the horror. A sweet, hitherto unknown tenderness welled from his heart. A mist arose before his eyes, obscuring the dead features and when it cleared away there was something wet upon his cheek. He trembled, not understanding, vaguely conscious of some great upheaval within him. He put up his hand to his face and drew it away moist. Then with the realisation came a great choking sob and he threw himself upon his brother's body in a passion of tears.

When the storm was over he rose with a great calm and gently closed the wide eyes and drew the gold-hafted knife from the wound. Then he knelt down beside the bed and, the memory of childhood coming back to him, repeated the Lord's Prayer. After which he bent down and kissed the waxen forehead and, drawing a seat to the bedside, sat and waited until they entered the room and found him.

A Tribute

IT is with deep regret that I have to record the death—at the age of thirty-three—of Mr. C. A. WILKINSON, the artist whose cover design for THE ARGOSY has been so generally admired, and whose woodcuts are famed for their atmosphere and charm. The woodcut of our cover was his last piece of creative art.

The late Mr. Wilkinson's work stamped him, not only as an artist already established, but one who would have risen to still greater achievements if his untimely illness had not ended fatally. Specimens of his woodcuts are, fortunately, preserved in the British Museum.

Of all the artists with whom I have been acquainted, Mr. Wilkinson was one of the most likeable, a stern critic of his own work and a man of delightful personality.—THE EDITOR.

Little Red Hero

"Courage consists in equality to the problem before us"

By ANDREW SOUTAR

WITH one exception, Pouter's Causeway had been wholly depleted of its menfolk, but it was enjoying an era of unusual prosperity, since the Government idea of a separation allowance was much more generous than the peace-time views of the men themselves. While the Saturday nights were suspiciously quiet, there was a freer exchange of thought among the dwellers during the day. The women talked about their men, read aloud their letters in the doorways, and invariably ended their gossip with an unemotional expression of gratitude to God that their man "hadn't been afraid to go." Always, it was the same—the nod of the head and the glance along the street to that upper window where the one exception was to be seen every evening.

Mr. Henry Joseph Widger was a machinist, and he and his wife and boy had resided in that upper tenement for two or three years. They had never associated with the neighbours beyond nodding in a friendly way as they passed them in the street. Widger was not tall, nor was he very frail; the casual glance would not convey the impression that he was a man who suffered or brooded; indeed, there was a certain cheeriness about his appearance, a crispness in his walk and manner that awakened in the minds of the neighbours the hateful suspicion that he was "doing well and saving it." The war appeared to leave Mr. Widger stone cold. He must have witnessed a dozen departures of men from that street, and unless his heart was made of granite, he must have experienced that indefinable thrill which has always been, and for ever will be, associated with the leave-taking of men on their way to the field of battle. Widger carried his years and his secret amazingly well—for there must have been a secret between him and his wife, a patient little woman with mouse-coloured hair and wrinkles under her big eyes. There must have been some secret of great import, else Widger would never have borne the ridicule and the sneers that poured from both sides of Pouter's Causeway.

Some of the women actually arranged for a recruiting sergeant to intercept Mr. Widger in the street as he was returning from his work. Every doorway was open that evening, and every threshold was occupied. As the red beard of Mr. Widger showed around the corner, there was a delighted scream: "Here's the little red 'ero. Give him a cheer." The recruiting sergeant was out to enjoy the jest; he was stout, blue-faced and brimful of self-importance. He dropped a heavy hand on the shoulder of the victim.

"Here, me lad! I got somethin' better for you to do than loafin' about in them togs."

Mr. Widger stopped, removed the fat hand from his shoulder, and said, almost politely:

"On another occasion, I may find you outside that uniform. I hope so—sincerely I do. Then—then I shall teach you a lesson in manners."

The sergeant was a very discriminating man, very observant; he marked something in the eye of Mr. Widger which, he felt, justified him in telling the wonder-struck women that they should get indoors and find something for their idle hands to do.

Before he reached his own door, Mr. Widger stepped into the roadway and glanced up at the topmost window. The face of a boy of eight was pressed against the pane.

"Sonny," said Mr. Widger, softly and to himself, as he waved a hand to the boy and went indoors.

The little woman with the mouse-coloured hair met him on the landing. It was dark, there, but she knew just where his hand would be, and timidly she slipped hers into it.

"I saw them, Joe"—with a sob in her voice.

"Never mind, old girl. I'm getting used to it."

As they went indoors, she put her arm around his shoulders.

" You are brave, Joe—braver 'n many of 'em out yonder."

" How brave ? "

" Standing it all without a murmur."

He patted her arm. " We can't all be soldiers, Emily ; and I reckon I'm more useful here than out there. Pity you can't make everybody understand that."

The evening meal was ready ; the two sat down.

" How's the corporal ? " asked Mr. Widger, suddenly.

" Didn't you see him up at the window ? "

He didn't speak for a minute. Then, " I was wondering if he saw me—if he saw that in the street."

" He wouldn't understand, Joe."

" He's a knowin' kid, old girl. Funny thing he said last night when I was playing soldiers with him. Lord ! Don't he love soldiers ? ' Why ain't you got a uniform, dad ? ' Fetched a lump right up here."

" Ye lied to him, Joe ? "

" Naturally. . . . Say, do these people chip you when I'm away ? "

" Nothin' to speak of, Joe. . . . I've got somethin' to tell you."

" Go on."

" My sister's man's been called up. He went yesterday."

" He's older than me."

" That's what Mary said."

" How did she say it ? "—suspiciously.

Emily's eyes gathered more wrinkles to the lids.

" She was all anyhow, Joe, and didn't know quite what she was saying. You know what they're expecting ? "

He nodded and went on with his meal.

" The allowance ain't much, Joe. An' we got an extra room."

" She can come, and welcome," said Joe. " And we'll see her through her trouble."

" Joe—Joe. There isn't another like you."

He shrugged his shoulders and brought her straightway out of idolatry.

" Foreman said to me, to-day, ' What's your age, Widger ? ' I told him. Thirty-six. ' Have you attested ? ' he said. I told him that I hadn't—yet. ' 'Um,' he said. ' Wish to God I was thirty-six instead of sixty-three ; I know where I'd be.' "

She was plucking at the hem of the table-cloth. " Ye see, Joe, ye *look* so well."

" I dare say there are worse in the Army," said Joe. " But I wish old men would give other fellows credit for a little patriotism. I don't like the way they sniff at you and sigh, and talk about what their boys are doing out there. I felt like saying something to the foreman, but, as he made me understand, I've got to regard him as an officer in the trade. But don't let's talk about it, to-night. I'm going upstairs to finish that little job for Sonny. I want to get my mind off the war."

The meal over, he went upstairs to the room that was given up to the boy and the lathe. The boy was very slim for his age, but there was fine intelligence in the big eyes. He clapped his hands delightedly when his father entered, and within a few minutes they were both at work on the model aeroplane which had kept them busy for many an evening. Between these two there was a perfect understanding. The boy made Widger feel young, and the ready way in which confidences were exchanged gave the boy years that were not his.

" Do you think we shall ever make a real aeroplane, dad ? "

" We could, if we tried," said Widger. " But what's the good of an aeroplane ? "

" I don't know," said the boy. " But that little fellow "—he pointed to the model —" seems to grow, when I'm asleep. Do you ever dream, dad ? "

" Not much," said Widger, pretending to be inordinately busy with the propeller.

" Grows bigger and bigger," said the boy, " and I climb into it, and away we go, dropping bombs."

" What d'you want to drop bombs for ? " —without looking up from the propeller.

" To kill the enemy, of course."

" You leave the enemy alone, my lad."

" I ain't touching him, dad. But "—the little hands were clenched—" I wish I was a soldier."

Widger dropped the tool with which he was working, and compelled the boy to look at him.

" Look here, Sonny, you've got to get that out of your head ! Supposing you was a soldier, and you had an aeroplane with bombs in it, and there was a man with the German name for Widger, who had a boy with the German name for ' Sonny,' and they thought no end of each other, same as you an' me ; and one evening, same as it was this evening, you came along on your aeroplane and dropped a bomb, and you killed the man and left the boy without

anyone to love him—would it make you any the happier ? "

The boy said, " No," but it was easy to see that the proposition was beyond his powers of analysis.

" Why aren't you a soldier ? " he asked, with the facility of the precocious child who seeks to evade a problem.

" Would you like me to be one ? " asked Mr. Widger.

" Rather ! " said the boy. " I don't know how many times I've seen you marching along the street down there along with the other soldiers."

" Imagination ! "

" You're always there, and you always look up at the window as you pass, and I salute you—just like this "—and he brought his hand to his forehead.

" Ah ! my boy," said Widger, " you're not the only one who'd like to see me in a uniform ; but there are reasons, and good ones, why I don't get one. Some of us have to stay behind and make things. What's the good of a soldier if he hasn't got a gun, or cartridges ? Somebody has to make them."

" But when they've got enough, dad—will you go then ? "

" Most likely," said Mr. Widger, biting his lips. " Most likely, Sonny."

" Right-o, dad. And I'll be here, up at the window. You'll look for me ? "

" You bet ! " said Mr. Widger.

The boy was one of the few joys left to the little machinist. He might pass through a day of almost intolerable ridicule, might smart under the open taunts of women whom he passed in the street, but all the pain was alleviated of an evening when he bent over the lathe in the boy's room and fashioned the innumerable toys that wove a halo around his head in the mind of the boy. Of a Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning, the two went for short walks in the country, until it became impossible to find any tract of land that was free of soldiers drilling. Moreover, it became increasingly difficult to evade the recruiting officers.

Emily's sister came to take up her abode in the Widger house. Her husband had been sent to one of the home garrisons, where he was occupied for the most part as a farrier. Mary was a heavily built woman, with a complaining voice. Her greeting to Mr. Widger showed the tactlessness of the woman.

" Ah, Joe ! You're a knowing one. If I'd knowed as much as I do now, I wouldn't have let him attest. Still, we've all got to do something, haven't we ? And them as don't do anything will have it on their conscience as long as they live." Then, when she saw the twitching lips of Mrs. Widger and the frown on the little man's face, she tried to rectify the blunder. " Present company excepted, Joe ! Mind you, Herbert's having the time of his life. But, then, he was lucky—got a gentleman's job, and his officers think no end of him. They'll not part with him in a hurry, and if it wasn't for the loneliness I shouldn't mind. Pity you're not strong, Joe."

" Who said I wasn't ? " Mr. Widger asked. " Herbert ? "

" No ; he never mentions you," she said. " But he's like that. He's not as broad-minded as I'd like him to be. Now I can guess why you ain't in a hurry to give up a good job. But men are that selfish, they see only one side of things."

¶

AND so the days passed, and every evening Mr. Widger was subjected to a piece of the Mary mind. The wife was always endeavouring to play the part of peacemaker, or, rather, to soften the blows unwittingly inflicted by her sister. Then came the day when the foreman at the works bluntly informed Henry Joseph Widger that while he would find it difficult to get a better machinist, he had to consider the needs of the country.

" We've all got to bear hardships, Widger," he said. " That's the privilege of being a Briton. And I don't see why better men than you should have to give up everything and go to the front while you, a comparatively young man, should stay at home and draw fat wages. You're off the pay-sheet."

Mr. Widger took the blow very manfully. As if the world had been suddenly made aware of his dismissal, there were no gauntlets to be run that night on his way home. In fact, one old lady on a tram whispered to him behind the shelter of her newspaper : " Forgive an old woman, but I *know* why you're not in khaki. I'm sorry for you."

He made no reply. It was when he reached his own house that he received the first sting of the day since leaving the presence of the foreman. Tied to the

knocker of the door was a bunch of dirty white feathers. He cut the hideous thing down and put it in his pocket.

Mary's soldier husband came home on leave that night, and for an hour after tea, Mr. Widger was held in a pillory while the farrier talked about his officers and his gratitude to Heaven for being given the chance to serve his country. Mr. Widger didn't tell his wife of his dismissal. He kept silent, and smilingly nodded acquiescence in her suggestion that in honour of Herbert's return they should go to a little extravagance. It was Mr. Widger who went down the street to purchase the refreshment, and he had to pass along a avenue of women, who made pertinent remarks about slackers who stayed at home and coined so much money out of munitions that they could live like fighting-cocks. They asked him, by shouts, if he wanted a butler, and he pretended not to hear their taunts though they hurt nevertheless.

The soldier brother-in-law became more voluble under the influence of the refreshment. For the entertainment of the women he gave them an imitation of how the enemy might be bayoneted. He wanted to use Mr. Widger for the purpose of the demonstration, but when he stooped to grasp the little man by the wrist and drag him out of his chair, two bright eyes looked straight through him, and he felt the wrist harden and the hand clench. Then he suggested that Sonny might be brought down to see his uncle in his uniform. Mr. Widger said "No"—it was late, and the boy was in bed.

"But you ought to bring him up to this sort o' thing, Joe," said the brother-in-law. "Even if you like to stand out of it, you've got to consider the boy."

"He's my boy," said Mr. Widger, rising from his chair, "and I know what's good for him and what isn't. And I'd like to say this to you, Herbert—you're welcome to come to my house and stay your leave, but it is my house, and you've no right to use it as if it was a barracks."

"Joe!" gasped the soldier's wife. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, talking to *him* like that!"

"Leave him to me, Mary," said the soldier, drawing himself up as if he were on parade.

Mrs. Widger clasped her hands and called out faintly: "Let's be friends. Joe didn't mean anything.'

"Joe did," said Mr. Widger. The little man was facing the soldier. "He meant every word he said."

The soldier tried to be generous. "Come Joe," he said, coaxingly, "you ain't giving me your 'lip,' are you?"

"If I wanted to," said Mr. Widger, boldly, "I would. I've put up with your wife for a long while, and why? Not because I was bound to do it. But I'm not going to stand you coming here to my house and talking as if I was dirt."

Herbert persisted in trying to smooth down the ruffled feelings, but he did it in the wrong way.

"All right, Joe," he said, "we can't all be soldiers. There ain't a lot of you—why not join the Bantams?"—an obvious tilt at Mr. Widger's lack of stature.

"When I join the Army," said Mr. Widger, "I hope they'll put me in the front—in the trenches, along with the other men, not in a barracks at home, shut up from all danger and fatted and petted as if I was a broody hen! You can take it out of that, Herbert. And now you've started me, you may go on. Bantams! Have you ever seen a Bantam fight?"

With commendable restraint, the soldier went back to his chair.

"Joe," he said, "I take back all I said to you. It was meant in good part. You've been good to the wife, and if so be that I've got to go to the front—and I ain't afraid, I want to go—if I go, I shall feel calm in my mind, knowing that Joe Widger is doing his bit at home, and giving my wife a roof and a bit of company."

Mr. Widger was mollified. He, too, made a generous apology. Then, as if to substantiate his protest that he was ready to become a soldier, he said to the brother-in-law:

"When a man attests, what happens to him, Herbert? Do they send him away at once, or do they gave him a chance——"

"Bless you!" said Herbert. "A man I knew attested in the morning, was medically examined in the afternoon, and was on his way to Malta at night." The words had hardly passed his lips when all the courage of Mr. Henry Joseph Widger appeared to evaporate. White and nervous, he left his chair and went to the door.

"I'm tired," he said, looking back from the threshold. "I'm going up to sit with the boy for a bit. What are you going to do?"

The brother-in-law's face had also undergone a change. He wanted to cry out, "Little coward!" but there was a pathetic expression on the face of Mrs. Widger, so all that he did was to look to his own wife for guidance. Mrs. Widger whispered to her sister.

"He's all upset," she said.

Herbert overheard. "We're going to the music-hall to-night, Joe. What say you?"

"No, thanks," said Mr. Widger. "You may go. It would do the wife good. Get your things on, Emily. I shall stay at home."

And so he went upstairs, and Emily, fearing for his peace of mind, followed after him. The brother-in-law looked at his wife and said: "What's the matter in this house?" And Mary, as if only just aware that something was amiss, replied:

"Have you ever heard Joe cough?"

The soldier slapped his knee. "Mary," he said, "I'm a thickhead! I ought to have guessed it. Did you see his face go white when I talked about a medical examination? I've heard of a chap, same as him, who was afraid to go before the doctors because of what the doctors might tell him. I'll go and talk to him."

"No, you leave him be," said Mary. "That's her trouble, and she wouldn't thank you for interfering."

In a little while, Mrs. Widger came back. She said that her husband was making things for Sonny, and it was his wish that they should go to the music-hall and leave him at home. Herbert, the soldier, began to say that there was "no call for Joe to see the dark side of things," but Mary pinched his arm because of something she had seen in Mrs. Widger's face. The three of them went to the music-hall, and the little man kept the boy company, telling him stories and singing to him until he fell asleep. When the party returned from the music-hall, they found Mr. Henry Joseph Widger studying a pamphlet on recruiting. He tried to put it behind him when the others entered the room, but the brother-in-law dared to filch it. Mr. Widger made a half-hearted attempt to snatch it away, but the soldier was too quick for him.

"See here, old son," he said, "what 'n sort of a life am I going to have in the Army if I don't know where the missus is? Who's going to look after her if you clear out? Hasn't the family done enough? You stay at home, Joe. There's good work for you to do here, and we want all the shells we can get. What do you want doing in the Army!"

"I was going to ask you that," said Mr. Widger, ironically.

"Earning good money, ain't you?"

"What's that got to do with you?"

"Come, Joe, old fellow, why are you up against me?"

"Because you haven't learnt the first rule in discipline—how to keep your place."

Early the next morning Mr. Widger left the house as usual. The others thought that he had gone to his work, but he returned about ten o'clock. He came up the stairs with the quick, sprightly step of a youth. Mrs. Widger opened the door.

"What's wrong, Joe?" she cried out.

He waited until he got into the middle of the room. The brother-in-law, lounging in a chair and minus his tunic, added a further inquiry:

"You're all shaking, Joe. What's happened?"

Mr. Widger looked at his wife for a minute before he felt for her hand.

"I've attested," he said.

"You?" cried Herbert.

The little man's eyes flashed angrily. "Yes, me! And why not? I'll make as good a soldier as you."

"I'm not saying anything about that, Joe, but—have they examined you?"

"There wasn't much need of that," said Mr. Widger. "The doctor knew."

"Knew what?"

"Knew a man when he saw one."

"He passed you?"

"Yes," said Mr. Widger, "and he said that my body was a great tribute to my head. 'You've looked after yourself,' he said. 'I wish there were more like you.'"

Mrs. Widger was playing nervously with her apron.

"Joe," she whimpered, "if it's all true, what—what's going to happen? They'll call you up at once."

"No, they won't," said Mr. Widger. "I made certain about that. I'm going to appeal."

"Appeal!" the brother-in-law exclaimed. "Do you mean that you're afraid?"

"I mean that I'm going to appeal," said Mr. Widger, "and I don't want you to interfere. What I do is my own business, not yours. I'm going to appeal for three months' exemption." And, with that, he went out of the room, and again was followed by his patient, wondering wife.

" Mary," said Herbert the soldier, " I used to pride myself on being a man, but I take my hat off to Joe Widger."

" He's a coward ! " said Mary, hotly.

" He isn't a coward," said Herbert. " Couldn't you read his face ? Couldn't you see him sneaking into the recruiting office and being attested ? Couldn't you see him standing in front of the doctor, knowing what the doctor was going to say ? Ay, and, Mary, couldn't you see the doctor shaking his head ? They'll stand anything in the Army but ' lungs.' Joe's pretending to his wife that they passed him fit ; he's pretending that he's going to appeal for exemption. Maybe at the back of his mind there's an idea that the war will be over in three months. I hope it will, for your sake, Joe Widger."

But the sentimental Herbert was wrong in his deductions. Henry Joseph Widger did appeal to the tribunal, asking for three months' exemption. Also, he asked that his case might be heard in camera.

" I believe," he said to the chairman, " that you gentlemen have no objection to hearing cases privately when there's a domestic matter to be talked about."

And so the case was heard in secret, and Joe Widger was granted three months' exemption. And one of the members of the tribunal passed a slip of paper to him, on which was written :

" If I can be of any service to you, either in the way of procuring you employment or assisting you financially, do not hesitate to call on me at the above address."

¶

THE suburban newspaper issued the next evening gave a list of the cases that had been tried before the tribunal on the previous day, and the statement that Henry Joseph Widger had been granted three months' respite served to infuriate the neighbours in Pouter's Causeway. The little man passed through a storm of hisses as he made his way to the house. But he told himself afterwards that Sonny's voice drowned all the other noise in his brain. He said to the boy :

" Would you like the old dad to be a soldier, Sonny ? "

" Like Uncle Herbert ? "

" Something like him."

" You'd look better 'n Uncle Herbert, dad. He doesn't walk as straight as you."

" Oh ! I shall make a soldier," said Mr. Widger, trying to smile. " Some soldier."

" Some dad," said the boy, pulling down his father's head so that cheek might be pressed against cheek. " But it'll be awful waiting here alone."

" You'll have the mother, Sonny."

" Yes, dad "—a little grudgingly.

" And you love your mother ? "

" I love you both," said the boy. " But you're so different. Who'll make me things when you've gone ? "

" But I thought you wanted me to go, Sonny. You're not going to back out of it now ? "

The boy shook his head doubtfully. " You'll look fine in a uniform, dad. But supposing—supposing that aeroplane we were talking about dropped a bomb on you ? "

" I shouldn't have told you that story," said Mr. Widger. " It was all make-believe."

" I've been thinking about it," said the boy. " I wish soldiers didn't have to fight —just walk up and down the street so's I could see 'em ! Will you have a sword, dad ? "

" No, Sonny. They don't want swords out there."

" I'm glad you won't have a sword," said the boy. " They're so sharp, ain't they ? You might cut yourself, and I wouldn't be there to help you tie a bit of rag round it. . . . Why do you always want me to tie up your finger when you cut it on the lathe ? "

" I don't know, Sonny. You do it so tenderly, and—and there's always tears in your eyes."

" Will you have to kill anybody, dad ? "

" I don't know, Sonny. You've got to do what the officers tell you to do."

" Supposing—supposing you did kill a man with the German name for ' Widger,' and he had a little boy——"

" Didn't I tell you that was all make-believe ? "

" All right, dad. . . . Will you rub my chest a bit to-night ? "

" Is it tight, old son ? "—as he drew down the blanket.

" Awful tight, dad—same as I can't breathe ; and I get that tired I want to go to sleep the whole day."

" Wait," said Mr. Widger, hiding the break in his voice by pretending to cough, " wait till you see the old dad in a uniform. You won't want to go to sleep after that."

" No, dad," said the boy, his eyes glowing. " I shall sit up in the window all day and wait for you passing. Will you salute me, dad ? "

" Rather," said Mr. Widger. " Rather, Sonny."

" And if you get a medal, will you give it to me ? "

" Sure," said Mr. Widger.

" For keeps ? "

" For keeps," said Mr. Widger. . . . " ' See that wet, see that dry ' "—and he made a pass across his throat with a forefinger.

" Ah," said the boy, " you always keep your word, dad. When are you going ? "

" They don't want me for a bit," said Mr. Widger, guardedly. " They said they'd let me know when they were a man short. But I've got to keep myself ready."

" I reckon they'll soon want you," said the boy. " Rotten we didn't finish that aeroplane, isn't it ? "

" Oh ! I'll finish it before I go," said Mr. Widger.

" And when you're out there," said the boy, in dead seriousness, " and you see aeroplanes in the air, will you fancy it's me coming to see you ? "

" I *know* it'll be you," said Mr. Widger.

" Ah ! " said the boy, and sighed. " Funny how we talk, ain't it, dad ? Do all boys talk to their dads like me ? "

" I expect so, Sonny. Not quite like you, because you're a special sort of Sonny, ain't you ? "

The boy's eyes closed. He was holding the father's hand beneath the blanket.

" I get awful sleepy, dad," he said. " Will you stay here a bit ? Pretend you're a sentry."

" I'll pretend," said Mr. Widger, and closed his lips tightly, because a sob threatened.

A few minutes, and when he thought the boy was asleep, he withdrew his hand and tiptoed to the door. One eye opened, then closed, and a tired voice came from the bed :

" Who goes there ? "

Mr. Widger tiptoed back. " Dad," he said.

" Pass, dad," said the boy. " Dear old dad ! "

Sonny sailed out on his aeroplane a month later, and three days after the little phthisis-torn body was laid to rest in the cemetery Mr. Widger went down to the recruiting office and asked that his exemption order might be cancelled. He was ready to go at once.

When Herbert, the brother-in-law, heard of it, he wrote to his wife asking for some explanation of all the mystery, and her reply was simply this :

" Joe was a bigger man than we took him to be. He had been told that the boy couldn't last three months, and the doctor had said that there appeared to be only one person in the world who could make the end easier for him, and that was his dad. That's why Joe kept out of it as long as he could. He did love that boy."

Private Henry Joseph Widger was attached to an infantry regiment, and on his way to the station from the depot he, with his comrades, had to pass along Pouter's Causeway. Mrs. Widger and her sister had locked up the house and were waiting at the station to say " Good-bye " to the little man. As the soldiers passed along the Causeway, the one on the left of Private Widger noticed that the little man straightened himself, threw back his head, and marched proudly, as if the eyes of the world were upon him. He glanced up at that top room window and, as he passed, flung up his hand briskly to the salute.

The other soldier, watching, said : " What are you doin', matey ? There warn't anybody there."

" Wasn't there ? " said Private Joseph Widger.

A New Masterpiece

THERE IS THE MAN!

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The latest and most powerful of this author's notable novels

Previous Chapters.

FRANK TARBOE, whose amazing career the author relates, is a real personage, and the story of his exploits as gambler, duellist, law-breaker and lover, is literally true.

Born of an Indian mother and a French father, Tarboe's character is curiously compounded. He has inherited the rough courage and nobility of the Indian race, while the strain of more refined blood in him demands the luxuries of civilisation, which he seeks without scruple. Having trained himself to "see" cards in his opponents' suits, he becomes a successful gambler.

The author meets Tarboe and recognizes in him great qualities of mind which, although misdirected, are none the less admirable. Their friendship, however, leads to a difficult situation which arouses the author's sense of moral responsibility. On board ship bound for Sydney, Tarboe falls in love with Alice Rahlo, the beautiful and gifted daughter of American parents whose social position is high. These new friends know nothing of Tarboe's reputation.

The author is determined that the truth shall be known and warns Tarboe, whose reply is that he will act according to his own peculiar code of honour. The situation is complicated by Alice Rahlo's infatuation for the gambler. She refuses to hear ill of him, and even conviction of the truth does not deter her from encouraging him.

Tarboe abruptly leaves her. He narrowly escapes imprisonment for conspiracy to defraud. When the author meets him in Paris, seven years later, he is still gambling and he has again escaped imprisonment, this time by "jumping his bail." He has not forgotten Alice Rahlo.

Nor has Alice forgotten Tarboe. But, in the meanwhile, she has married Simeon Drew, a wealthy American whom she admires and respects. Tarboe, when he hears this is anxious to meet Alice again, but the author does all he can to prevent a meeting which threatens social disaster.

The meeting does take place, and Tarboe tells Alice that he is about to marry a Creole widow in Paris. This arouses Alice's jealousy and she is determined to prevent the marriage. Greatly daring, she invites Tarboe to dinner to meet her husband.

XVII

Almost The End Of It All

THE day of Alice's dinner came and passed and I waked next morning oppressed by some imaginary trouble. I picked up the *Matin* at breakfast. Almost the first thing I saw was the leaded announcement that the night before, at eleven o'clock, Simeon Drew, the American tobacco king, had died suddenly at the Continental Hotel. Shocked, I showed the paper to my wife.

No details were given except that Mrs. Drew had been dining with a friend of her husband and herself, and that on Mr. Drew's return he had suddenly collapsed and had died of apoplexy in five minutes. He had not spoken after his fall to the floor. Medical examination had said he was naturally a healthy man, but sudden shock might bring on apoplexy. It could not be supposed he had suffered any shock, and his wife said he was normal when he went to the banquet, leaving her dining with his and her friend, Mr. Frank Tarboe, whom they had known many years. Mr. Tarboe said that Mr. Drew collapsed on entering the room and spoke no word thereafter. An inquest would be held, but it was not thought new facts would come to light. His wife was expected to be sole legatee of his fortune. She bore herself calmly. She had no tears, but remained immobile and extremely pale. No doubt the body would be taken to America for burial.

I turned to my wife. "It's an ugly story; I wonder why he collapsed. He wasn't the sort to cave in like that."

She nodded. "It is a horrible ending—to his immense love."

Before I left the Vendôme for the Continental I said: "I had presentiments about the dinner and this is the end of it! I tried to persuade her, but she would not

listen and finally asked us both to come. I told her I would not allow you to meet Tarboe at a dinner. She would listen to nothing—and now this!"

"It was nice her asking us," my wife said. "It shows naught was wrong in her mind about the dinner. It proves her innocent!" She looked at me enquiringly. I shook my head. I did not know quite what to think.

I arrived at the Continental and found that the body was in a room adjoining the big apartment Drew had taken, and was being embalmed. Death from natural causes was the verdict at the inquest. I did not see the body then. I entered Mrs. Drew's apartments and was told she would see me. At last the door of the bedroom opened and Alice entered. She was dressed in black and her face was the most agonised I have ever seen! There was no dreaming in the eyes, but stark and terrible reality. She had found life and herself, and her dreaming was over for ever. Her eyes were like wells of darkness, her mouth was set and rigid, she moved with painful slowness.

I caught her right hand in both of mine and pressed it. For an instant her eyes seemed to submerge, then they became dry again, and she said slowly: "You see it's all over—for ever and ever."

I inclined my head. "You know how I felt, how set I was against the dinner."

She said quite deliberately: "It ended in shame and tragedy."

"Shame!" I said aghast.

"The truth will never be told, but he caught me in Tarboe's arms, with my lips to his, and so he fell—his heart was wrong. He died of shock."

"Good God! That was the end was it? He had loved you with all his heart."

"Yes, he loved me, but see, I will not take his money. I will not spend his fortune. I would rather starve."

"That's nonsense," I said. "He only saw Tarboe kiss you."

She looked at me steadily. "He knew all there was to know. I will not be his legatee. I will not."

"But you will. Do you wish the finger of suspicion pointed at you for the rest of your life? That will happen if you do not become his legatee. Can't you see?"

"I don't care. I'll bear shame for the wrong I did him."

"Is it fair to your father and mother and all your old friends? Will you tell them you were caught by your husband in Tarboe's arms? Is it playing fair? You ought to keep Drew's name free from shame. Think hard, my dear—think hard."

She made a helpless gesture. "Oh, my God, how blind I've been these many years!" She looked me in the eyes. "In my *heart* I was really guilty, and Sim knew the truth!"

Then with a sudden will she added: "I've finished with Tarboe for ever."

"But you insisted. He did not want to dine with you, and you made him, didn't you?"

"I'd have done anything to prevent him marrying that woman."

"Let the dead past bury its dead. Tell me, will you inherit your husband's fortune? Will you?"

For a moment she sat moveless, her eyes brooding. "There's naught else to do, perhaps," at last she said, with dejection.

"If he knows the *truth* about you now, he'd will you his fortune again. His own bad constitution killed him."

"No, I murdered him," she said in agitation. "But for me he wouldn't have died."

"Play a commonsense part now, my friend."

Her face was full of concentrating purpose and sorrow. At last she nodded and sighed heavily. "I'll not refuse, if he has left it to me. But oh, my God, the shame!"

"That's right. My wife will come to help you as I can't. But I'll make all other arrangements, if I may."

She nodded. "See his lawyer and his agent. They are both in the hotel."

I nodded and turned to go. She touched my arm.

"Dear old friend," she said, "I'd like to go after Sim and tell him all!"

I pressed her hand. "Perhaps he knows all."

XVIII

To Meet No More.

THE morning when the body of Simeon Drew left Havre in a French ship called the *Touraine* was clear of any cloud in the sky, the sun making Havre and the sea and all the wide horizon and the world beautiful. With Drew's secretary and agent I said good-bye to Alice on the deck. The casket had been placed in a large stateroom, carefully wedged to prevent movement in

a high sea, and a sailor was to watch it night and day.

Alice's face was still terribly pale and her big eyes shone with a new look—that of understanding of life, which she had never known before. The captain, first officer, purser, and doctor were all presented, and she bore herself with dignity and almost rigid composure. She was of her surroundings and yet not of them. She was living in a world apart, in a fantastic dream. Fortunately Drew's secretary and agent were going on the ship, and they were the link with the practical life of to-day. I felt that if I closed my eyes for an instant and opened them again she would not be there, so withdrawn was she from the life in which we moved. Though her tragedy had at first given anguish to her face, all anguish had now gone, and there remained the immobile look of one who had seen the worst that life can do, had passed through the terrible portals of tragedy and disgrace, the horror of life's most excruciating moments, which has robbed the spirit of outer expression, and had left it dazed and dumb. So she seemed to me. All the years she had lived were as nothing to the revelation of the last two days. In them centuries of experience had been crowded.

The ship was ready to go. I bade her good-bye, holding her slim hand, which lay lifeless in mine, and she said to me, with truthful premonition in her eyes: "Life bites deep, my friend. We shall meet in peace at last—sometime!" Then a strange fine fleeting smile touched the corner of her lips, and I said in reply: "Yes, in peace at last." She turned her head away and walked quietly towards her stateroom.

I watched the ship move slowly from the dock and face the open sea, and I sighed because it was as though the wide sea was taking from me a lifeless body, and another body which had life, but from which the soul or spirit had gone. Presently a voice said behind me: "I shan't ever see her again."

I turned. It was Frank Tarboe. He was erect, grim-faced, sad-eyed, but, unlike the woman, wholly a part of this active, strident, noisy world.

I shook my head at him. "You and she had your own way of doing things. That man died through you. You both will pay the price."

For an instant he did not reply, then he said: "I want to talk to you. In half an hour the train starts for Paris. My bag is on the train—shall we?"

"Yes," I said, "we will return to Paris together."

We got into a cab and reached the train, without having spoken a word. We entered the train, selected a compartment which we would have to ourselves, rang for the waiter and ordered lunch.

Presently I said: "Please tell me of that last scene at the hotel and of yourself since."

He looked at me for a moment without speaking, then he said: "It is not the penalties of life we have to face, but the accidents. How many times have I done worse things than I did that night, and escaped without exposure of any kind? Strange that the only time I kissed her or held her in my arms should be the moment when the door opened, her husband entered and closed it behind him. Perhaps it all was meant to be, but why should his life go for no wrong he had done?" A frown gathered on his forehead, he made one or two quick motions of the lips, showing sharp strain, and then I said:

"Why these things happen only the eternal judgment book can tell. He would have killed you, Tarboe, it was in him—the ruthless merciless hand of that man would have seized a knife and struck you dead. I saw it in him from the first—the quiet, powerful-minded, honest citizen, who knew no compromise and would admit no concession."

Tarboe nodded: "I know, and I would not have fought him. I meant to do no harm, to take no more than I had taken from her lips and from the warm pressure of her body to mine, but meaning this or meaning that aside, I played low in being there at all. I wanted only to hold her in my arms once and kiss her on the lips and then no more. It sickens me to think that he should be taken and me left. She turned from me when Drew died, and would never see me again. When I saw her to-day as you talked to her, hidden as I was by boxes on the dock, I felt that not only he had lost his life, but that she had lost what is deeper than life—it seems silly of me to talk of purity, but she was pure in soul and body."

"Tarboe," said I, "it was not either of you in one way, it was the little Creole widow in the Champs Elysées."

He waved a hand: "Don't think I'm not ready to take full responsibility. I am. I'm only trying to find a reason for it—the end of it I know, and I shall never see Alice again. She's in a world where I've no part at all."

Suddenly he clasped his hands and bowed his head, and a look of misery came to his face; "Alice brought out always the best in me. For her I could have given up even playing cards, but I was not fit for her. I had always been a villain, because I was of the world and would always be. I was never wholly bad and never wholly good. Blessing and curse were in all I did, and all I thought, and so to-day when the *Touraine* moved off upon that tossing floor of water, I said to myself: 'There goes the last glimmer in the gloom.' For the last forty-eight hours I've lived like one shut off from earthly hope. I've been down deeper than Hell, down where Satan and his hordes would not and could not go. I've lost in those black wells all that made life worth while—I did what has robbed this world of the best of men. I said to you once that a woman could love two men. I take it back. It can't be done. She loved me—she did not love him—but she thought she did. Now, she hates me and she loves the memory of him." He caught hold of the table between us and it shook with his emotion.

Then, as I made no reply, at last he looked out of the window, at the green trees, the grass, the flying birds, the houses and the chateaux, the lovely grounds past which the train sped. Time passed and he grew quiet.

XIX

We Meet Again.

THE years went by. The interests of my life grew wider and more varied. I entered the British Parliament in 1900, but I had travelled before that in Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Greece, Turkey, Austria, Italy, Germany,and nearly all the European States, and since then in America, South Africa and elsewhere. I met many distinguished and notorious people, but never one with such interest for me as Frank Tarboe. I resigned Parliament in 1918, owing to overwork and ill-health. In 1924 I could not spend the Winter in England, so I decided to go to Aiken, South Carolina, where I had been in 1901.

In many years I had never heard of Tarboe, but I came to know that three years after the death of Simeon Drew in Paris, Alice died in Kentucky. The tragedy of those days in Paris was often in my mind, and I remembered her words to me in the Continental Hotel: "I'd like to go after Sim and tell him all." Life had been so tremendously busy that only in odd moments did the memory of those tragic days come to me. One day in London, however, I picked up the *Evening Standard*, and I saw that Frank Tarboe had been arrested in Montreal for conspiracy to defraud at cards, and that Scotland Yard had sent to the police in Quebec the dossier of the man who had won notoriety in England by the fight with sabres in Old Quebec Street. It seemed almost impossible that the man I had met in 1885 should still be pursuing his old pernicious trade in the old pernicious way.

I left London in November and went to Aiken. It is a winter resort for fashionable northern people, and with only four hotels of size or character. The most important of these was Wilcox's, which was beside the railway, and had not many conveniences, was small but immensely popular. Having stayed there in 1901, I received from a Mr. Wilcox, an Englishman, who had been a butler to W. C Whitney, the famous Minister of the Navy in Cleveland's Cabinet, a cable that rooms would be ready for me. I found later that the Mr. Wilcox I knew was dead but his widow was living, and his son managed the hotel. I stayed there until New Year's Eve, and then I went to the Highland Park Hotel, because the rooms I had at Wilcox's were let from that date.

One night I told Tarboe's story to the Hon. Wallace Nesbitt, K.C., of Toronto, once a member of the Supreme Court of Canada, to William Warner Bishop, the President of McCall's Magazine, and to a Mr. Gilbert, who is one of the Directors of the Irving Bank in New York. The three men were fascinated by his story and Nesbitt said: "By gad, I'll try to get Tarboe out of prison! A more remarkable story I've never heard, and he must have his chance again. I don't know the Chief Justice of Quebec, but I know the Attorney General, and I'll write to him. It is the custom in every country to give prisoners a chance even after condemnation, and why not in Canada?" Then Mr. Gilbert

told of a man who had been arrested for heavy stealing in New York and had been released from the Tombs on the guarantee of his wife, and is now one of the best citizens of the state. Well, this was just before I left Aiken, and I got the reply of the Attorney General through Mr. Nesbitt. It said there was no one on their books called Frank Tarboe, but there was a Fred Todero, and he had been imprisoned for only three weeks. I said to myself: "How did the *Evening Standard* know it was Frank Tarboe?" Tarboe had often changed his name and why shouldn't he have done so again in Montreal? Besides, F. T. were the initials of his own name!

Warner of McCall's said: "I must have that story. You shall meet my Editor in New York. I met the Editor at luncheon, arranged for this story, and I said to him: "I want to know what has happened to Tarboe since. I'll advertise for him, so the following notice appeared in the *New York Times:*

Botany Bay wishes to meet Frank Tarboe, whom he met on the way to Los Angeles, in Honolulu, in New Zealand, in Australia, in London and in Paris.

I did not use my own name, only "Botany Bay," because only four people knew what happened at Botany Bay, and two of them were dead. The replies were to be sent from the *New York Times* to McCall's Magazine.

There came many replies, in none of which save one I believed, and my judgment was correct about that one, as I afterwards found. At last a letter came from Chicago—it was written at the Blackstone Hotel, and it said:

My address is Frank Tarboe, *c/o* W. J. Brown, Dearborn Express Co., 539, North State Street, Chicago, Ills. Will be pleased to hear from you.

Sincerely,
FRANK TARBOE.

I had forgotten Frank Tarboe's handwriting, and I said: "This looks crooked—Blackstone Hotel and two other addresses." However, I wrote, without sending my name, but signing "Botany Bay," a typewritten letter and said: "If you are Frank Tarboe, tell me what happened at Botany Bay." There came a reply by telegram:

It is me all right. My house Old Quebec Street, Marble Arch, London. Friends Alonzo, Little Bill, Captain Graham, Colyer, Carew, Horace Joe Leigh. Sir Joseph Bank's Hotel, Botany Bay, Mrs. Frank Smith, Proprietress. Friends Teddy Knight, J. D. Robinson. Write me same as before.

Then a letter followed, written also from the Blackstone Hotel, Chicago:

Since I wired you last night, I have been thinking. I may be wrong, but it's strange to me that the whole thing fits exactly. I left San Francisco in 1885 for Honolulu, after a stay there I sailed for Sydney, N.S.W. I lived at the Sir Joseph Bank's Hotel, Botany Bay. I spent some time in Australia, New Zealand and Tasmania, where I became well known and much advertised. I have never heard of another name like mine, and if I am not the Frank Tarboe you met, someone must have used my name. I am six feet tall, very dark, and then weighed about 160 pounds. I played cards and raced horses. From Australia I went to India, Egypt and Europe. I lived in London and Paris for years. I travelled *all over* the world several times, and never heard the name Frank Tarboe. In London I was the principal in the cutless case, about 1895. My friends in London all went to Old John Carr's. Anyway, you have me guessing and I would like to hear the outcome.

Yours truly,
FRANK TARBOE.

In reply I wrote over my own name and said: "You are Frank Tarboe all right, and I want to meet you again."

I asked him to dine with me in New York the day following my expected arrival. There was no response to that letter, but two days after reaching New York, the telephone rang. A voice said: "I am Frank Tarboe." I recognised it—there could be no mistake. I said: "Will you dine with me to-night at the Pyrenes Restaurant?" The reply was: "All right—with pleasure." Then I asked for his address, but he would not give it.

I spent a busy day, but I was thinking of Tarboe all the time. When I stepped into the lobby of the restaurant in Sixth Avenue there he was, not looking older than when I saw him last, though his hair was white, but he was as slim as of old and as quietly dressed, and he stood with military salute, his eyes shining, when he saw me enter. He did not look a day more than fifty-seven or fifty-eight, and he was quiet in manner, and youthful in walk. Like some women, he had the power of attraction. The maître-d'hotel and the waiter for our table, though they did not know him, were evidently impressed by him, and they gave us good attention.

We began our dinner and he was so excited he could scarcely eat. He saw me

glancing round the restaurant: "Looking for someone you know, because of me? Ashamed of me?" he asked.

I answered sharply: "Don't be silly, Tarboe. If I was ashamed, do you think I'd dine you in a public restaurant? I've never been ashamed of you."

He smiled whimsically.

"I know that—knew it when I asked. I suppose I wanted to hear you say that. You don't care a fig for public opinion, if you know you're on the right track. I ain't sure you're on the right track in having to do with me—an ex-gaolbird and gambler, but I like it just the same. You and I ain't the least alike—you a great literary man with the world at your feet, I an outcast at the feet of the world; but I like it—I like it!"

At last he drew a flask from his pocket, in this prohibition city. "Whisky—will you have some?" I nodded. "I want to drink your health, Tarboe." I said. I raised my glass. "Here's to you for ever and for ever!" We both drank it off.

I never drink whisky, but I drank this because I wanted to toast my old rapscallion friend, and I suppose it was the first glass of whisky I had drunk in twenty years, but it was the best I ever tasted.

"Bless you, bless you, you are the real thing!" he said.

It was not a time for regular talk, but I said: "Are you doing pretty well?" His reply was: "Oh yes, I took thirty thousand dollars out of Jaggermall (an assumed name) last month." Presently, in reply to a question, he denied that he had been imprisoned in Montreal. I said: "How old are you?" He said: "Seventy-three." "Well," I said, "your eye is as bright as a boy of thirty." "Yes," he replied, "I've never had a toothache in my life, and every tooth in my head is sound. I could bite a nail in two. I never had a headache or a day's illness, and never expect to—no."

I said: "Why do you never expect to?" He said: "I'll die suddenly—mebbe!" There was a queer look in his eyes when he said it.

"I suppose so," I replied, understandingly.

"Tarboe, why didn't you give me your real name and address?" I asked.

"Well, I'm not living under my own name. I'm in one of the most respectable hotels in New York. I had to change the name for mine was known in every central police court in the world. I'm living at the Sauterne. If I'd given my own name, they wouldn't have let me in, it's so well known everywhere. The constables know all about it. The Chief of Police said: 'That's all right, Frank, go under any name you like. We'll understand.'"

The talk was very haphazard and without method, but I arranged during dinner that we must meet many times, and we should plan out our talk so that I could get all I needed for my story of his life. So many memories were crowding, so much had happened since we had seen each other last, such scores of questions were coming to my mind, that it was impossible to keep the talk concentrated. I can see the crowded restaurant and the people all round us, though we sat against the wall; and why I know not, but faces were turned in our direction, because perhaps we seemed an ill-assorted pair as to outward appearances, but inside perhaps, "Like the captain's lady and Judy o'Grady, the same thing under the skin." It was a summer night, and I can see the pink shades of the candles, and the distant whirring of the fans on the walls, and hear the buzz of talk, but all the time we were not in a real world, but in some fantasia of the spirit, some grotesque haven of life, in some impossible, improbable vision.

At last he leaned across the table and said: "Is there anything I can do for you? I always believed you'd get to a high place, you're a bigger man than I, a million times, but you liked me and I liked you. What can I do for you?" I said, smiling: "Tarboe, you can give me a bottle of brandy," for I had to take a little every night on the advice of my doctor. He leaned back in his chair. "Holy smoke, is that all? We have the best always, we card men. The best in the world is yours. Don't you like whisky?" "No," I said, "I can't drink whisky. I have drunk this because it's yours." He said: "Would your servant like some whisky?" I said: "He would, I'm sure," so he brought him a bottle, and later, another.

"Tarboe, tell me, how did you feel the day you were condemned?"

A curious, far-away look of trouble and of resolution came to his eyes. "I expected punishment, so I wasn't surprised. For an instant the courtroom grew dim when

my sentence came, but the Judge's voice stole from an infinite distance, quiet, terrible and cold in his condemnation. Then my sight came back. I looked at the Judge. I bowed. I looked round the courtroom; no faces there friendly to me. I sniffed the half-poisoned air, and, with a warder in front of me and one behind me, walked slowly down the spiral steps to the room beneath, where there was one bench. The warder motioned me to sit down, which I did. There came to my mind a picture of the three years I was to spend shut out from this workaday world, from the pleasant freedom of the open spaces, to be at the beck and call of officers and warders and guarders, to eat and exercise according to rule, and wear the black arrow on the prison clothes. I didn't like it.

" I was condemned in the same building though not in the same courtroom, as Oscar Wilde. The door opened above, and I saw him come staggering down the staircase, fat, hunched, haggard, with eyes staring and horror and agony in his look. I did not know him, though I had seen him more than once, and I got to my feet, and when he reached the bench, I stood up and put my arms around him. My heart was moved. It was horrible that he, who had stood so high in the literature of the world, should be in the ditch, where all could throw stones of contempt, and hatred and slander at him. I have no religion that I know of, but I talked to him quietly, like a man of the world, and said he should have courage and see it through. His broken reply was: 'How could they do it! How can I bear it! I shall not live—I shall not live!'

" 'You'll live, you'll fight it through,' I said. 'God be good to you,' and then warders separated us, and he went to his prison and I to mine. The memory of him blotted out my own shame, my own horror."

I said to him at last: " Tarboe, what was life like in prison?"

" Well," he said, " we had only porridge and brown bread for breakfast, and the same for supper. Dinner was in the middle of the day, and it was only soup, sometimes—very seldom—a little meat in the soup. We never got meat but once a week—never. My porridge would stand upright when I tipped it out, and I scooped a bit off the top and put a little water in and ate it. Look at my muscles!" Muscles absolutely like iron; I never had seen better, not even in Sandow. He said: " I've seen people arrive in prison, big like that, and small like that," he made gestures, " and leave as slim and strong as me. For sure, it ain't the food I'd recommend, but it's good for strength and health. Fact is, we all eat too much."

I said: " Did they work you hard in prison?"

" Not hard. I was condemned to three years because I jumped my bail, and for good conduct (as you know) I got out at the end of two years and four months," and there was a curious twinkle in the corner of his eye.

" Well, Tarboe, you asked me once to write your life. I'm going to now."

" Good—good!"

" Don't be afraid of what I'll say about you."

" I'm not feared—no!"

" I've always believed in 'The soul of goodness in things evil'."

" Yes," he said, " that's right. Haddon Chambers said it in his play, 'The Idler'."

" Did you know Haddon Chambers?"

" Intimately—intimately. When he had a first night in London he'd ask me to sit with him, and the same in New York."

" You've had some very distinguished friends."

" Yes, most distinguished friends!" And he winked at me as if to say I was one.

" Tarboe, when you left prison, what happened? Did you get your own clothes?"

" No, they gave me a ready-made suit. I went straight to my tailor and he met me with open arms, and said: 'Come upstairs.' He said: 'We knew when you were coming out, and at our request they sent us all your clothes. We've kept them here for you,' and there were my clothes and my boots with trees in them, and he offered to lend me £10! I said: 'Not a penny, not a penny.' Then I went to the Cafe Royal, and all my gambling friends were there—all of them. They knew when I was out that I'd go to the Cafe Royal. One man offered me £50, another £10, another £20. I could have had anything I wanted, yes, I could. And why did they do it? Because I'd killed two of the worst crooks in London. I didn't know it, but they had both died, within a year, from the wounds I gave them, and they were so grateful—

there's honour among rogues like me—that they were willing to do anything for me.

"I have no complaint against the Judge or Scotland Yard. They thought I got what I deserved. But I didn't. Those men came to kill me, and they died through me; but I wasn't arrested—there had passed out of the underworld of London two of the worst ever in it, and they knew it. I oughtn't to have jumped my bail! I realise that now. I feared I'd get a heavy sentence if my past all came out in Court, which it did. I never knowingly did anything wrong in my life—really wrong. All I can say is, while prison has finished my life with the outside world for ever and ever, it didn't spoil me—it made me."

XX

There is the Man.

AFTER our first dinner I met Tarboe several times. I dined with him one night at a restaurant far down town, where you could have quite a good dinner with wine included. It was a restaurant where gamblers used to meet, with a bar that was never raided. I will not say it equalled Sherry's of Delmonico's or that of the Ritz or the Plaza, but the food was fair, the place was clean, and the people coming and going were very well-dressed. I am bound, however, to say they were a pretty shady lot, though they could have dined—most of them—in any of the best clubs of New York. One night I was telling a member of a very important club about Tarboe. He said: "Why don't you bring him here?" My reply was: "What! Bring a goalbird and notorious gambler to this highly respectable club?" His reply was: "Why not? I live at the Club—bring him up to my room and we will have something to drink beforehand—I won't dine with you, but I'd like to meet that man."

I thought it over. I said: "All right. I'll bring him, but you must not let him suspect I've told you anything about his past career." He said: "You can rely upon it."

Well, I took him to the Club. We went to this member's room, and I had one cocktail, Tarboe had two and the member had two and then we talked, and Tarboe fascinated him as he did most people whom he met. He never was careless in his talk, he had an intuitive and perceptive mind—could adapt himself to circumstances, and when we were in the dining-room later, no one present imagined that a notorious criminal was dining with me.

Later we went to my hotel, and there he talked about himself, in reply to questions. I used to walk every day in the late afternoon before dinner, and he sometimes walked with me, and it was difficult to tell that we were not on the same social plane, so quietly was he dressed, and so natural his manner.

One day I said to him: "Tarboe, in the forty years I have known you, have you ever been penniless, or down and out?"

He laughed: "Yes, I was penniless in gaol, and down and out too, but never so out of gaol. Then I have not been down and out, but up and in."

"You owe the world a lot," I said. "You haven't worked for your living. You've got it by playing things low upon the world at large."

A shade crossed his face. "Playing things low! Gosh, I don't play things low! Those who play with me stand to win and I to lose."

I laughed. "On the whole though, you have won, and you are not a poor man."

A steely glitter came into his eye. "No, I'm not a poor man, but with what I've got by playing cards, I've given freely to many a poor devil out on his uppers, to many a good cause. I've given back to the world, apart from my living, which has never been costly, much that I've won. I am a devil, I know. I've been in gaol—I've been arrested. I've seen the depths of disgrace, but I've kept my eye sometimes on the stars. I'm black, but not all black; I'm bad, but not all bad; I've been in hell and I've been in heaven; I've been in waterspouts and hurricanes and storms and earthquakes, and I've been in the soft light of dawn and the glow of evening, and bells of peace have rung for me. You can't take from me what I've had. I've picked wild flowers from the salt bush plains of Australia. I've heard the bell-bird sing. I've been in the stranger's hut in the back blocks. I've carried my swag like a sundowner, and I've jumped my bail like a thief.

"I've seen the wild veldt of South Africa, and have lived underground there, and I've had my face in its dust, and the scar on

my forehead and that on my hand are some return for the happiness of life in Jo'burg and Molly Melsham, and the everlasting sun that one sees in South Africa—its loneliness, its beautiful loneliness, its kopjes, its spruits, its wild horses, and its dreary wastes made sweet by the human life on them."

He suddenly swung upon me and caught me by the arms. "Boy, oh boy," said he, "you strike at the heart of things, and you've struck the heart of me.

"By the great horn spoons, I'm no good, but there are worse than me in the world. I've killed, I've been drunk, I've gone large, but there never was a man with a sounder body than mine, and few with healthier spirit. Whether it's the Injun in me, belonging to this continent, or the Frenchman in me belonging to Europe, I don't know, but I do know this: ancestors I never knew, European, and the spirit of Indian chiefs through ages gone work in my veins, and between the two—here I am at seventy-three, with a body like iron and my step quick and my spirit young. Tell me, what does it all mean?"

I looked at his fiery eyes, and his flushed face, and I recalled the night when he had told me in my hotel of the fight in Old Quebec Street. Then he lived the whole scene over again. He described it to me as though it were happening, showed me how he fought them—the men who had come to kill him. Then, the perspiration had broken out on his face, his eyes became black with feeling, his colour was like that of an Indian ancestor dancing the dance of death. It was all so real, so terrific in its drama, that I looked at him now and said:

"Tarboe, ancient races work in you. You are not yourself only. You are what has come to you through Europe and America. God only knows who your father was, but he was a gentleman, for you've shown the gentleman's heart in many things, and as for your Indian chiefs, don't you realise there is more nobility in that ancient race, now in such a minority on the continent, than there is in those who in the late war performed in Christian Europe horrors that never the worst Indian in the world performed upon a captive. Torture—yes, in the old days, when torture was the habit of nations, but torture in 1914 to 1918, in this modern world, as they say in the language of the stress, it 'beats the band.'"

Tarboe's face cleared. He was as adroit as Machiaevelli, but as simple as a child—adroit in all the subterfuges and skill and deeds in his profession, but like a child in all other things. He was inherently great, not in his career, but in his native and delicate simplicity. How many times we walked and talked, and yet the names of our old friends in Australia had not once been mentioned. I wanted to speak to him about Alice Drew, but I could not bring myself to do it, and I could see by the far-away *triste* look in his eyes that he avoided it, too. Yet we must come to it all before the end of our talks, and as I walked with him, talked with him, and dined with him, I recalled that day when we saw the *Touraine* take Alice to America, and we travelled to Paris together.

At last we dined together at my hotel, and after we had eaten and by some accident fell silent, both thinking of the past, his eyes upon the ceiling, puffing his cigar, he said to me at last quietly and reminiscently:

"I want to tell you more of my life from the start. You know of my going to Cheyenne City. Well, after I left Cheyenne City I went to what is now a great centre, but what was then Harry Enderkin's Ranch, near Julesberg, on the Colorado River. It had a great saloon, and there one could get drink, always at a high price for those days, and most of the bold men of the West, as they were called, used to gather there. Buffalo Bill—William Cody with his handsome form and his long curls to his shoulders—used to frequent the place. He was called Buffalo Bill from shooting buffaloes for the American Army, and the soldiers used to gather them in.

"I was called Arizona Frank—I don't know why, because though I had been in Arizona, had fought duels, and played cards there, I was only called that because it sounded good, not because it was true. Well, I was near as tall as Buffalo Bill, but I never had his fame, except in the police courts, where I paid a big price for all my misdeeds, if misdeeds you call them. There are more crimes done in the Stock Exchange, and booming of lands in Florida than I've ever done. That cheating is on a prodigious scale. I don't cheat—I only see the cards with a trained eye. I can learn any game of cards in an hour. It makes no difference what game I play.

"Well, I used to go to Harry Enderkin's Ranch, and I saw a lot of Buffalo Bill and

Dashing Charlie. Dashing Charlie!—there was a man for you—through and through. He was afraid of nothing—could fight anything, and he did. He was like Bill Hickok, who was one of the most famous, and justly famous, fighters of the West. He snuffed out the lives of at least forty.

"Dashing Charlie was all right too, and I don't know how many men he killed but it don't matter. The West recalls him pleasant.

"Now, when we were all going to Enderkin's Ranch, which still exists, though it ain't so famous as in those far-off days, there came to see the wild life of which he had written much one known as Ned Buntline. His real name was Colonel Edward Zane Carroll Judson, and he was one of the most picturesque characters of this time. He was born near Stamford, New York, in 1823—was alternately a sailor at eleven years of age, a midshipman in the United States Navy at fifteen, and a lieutenant in the Seminole War, trapper, explorer, writer, fighter and was lynched by a mob in the streets of Nashville, Tennessee, but was cut down, fortunately before he was dead.

The lynching came from his having killed a man in a duel. Judson, known as Ned Buntline, was one of the founders of the 'Know Nothing' party, and the ringleader of the Astor Place Theatre Riots, and was sentenced by Judge Daly to a year's imprisonment in the penitentiary. Oh, we were a wild and criminal lot, but there was good stuff in us! Ned Buntline, to see the life as it really was, came out to Enderkin's Ranch, and there, with Buffalo Bill, wild Bill Hickok, Texas Jack Omohundro and Captain Crawford fought Indians, hunted buffalo and gathered material for the 'Tales of the Border' which thrilled hundreds of thousands of readers in later years.

"Ned Buntline made Buffalo Bill famous, and he wrote inimitable stories for the *New York Weekly*, which I think does not now exist. He was a drunkard, was Ned Buntline, but he was also a temperance lecturer, and John B. Gough, the temperance talker was the same. Greatly moved by the life at Enderkin's Ranch, Buntline went to Nixon's Amphitheatre in Chicago, taking with him Dashing Charlie, Buffalo Bill and Arizona Frank—that's me! Nixon let him have the theatre for a temperance lecture on a Sunday night, and he delivered his speech to great applause, and he had a fine throat for strong drink! I've seen him polish off two bottles of whisky in an evening, and he polished off half a bottle before he delivered his temperance lecture at Nixon's Amphitheatre in Chicago. Without Nixon's permission, at the close of the lecture, having Buffalo Bill, Dashing Charlie and myself in the wings, he calls on the stage us three tall, and if I do say it, good-looking men, and says he: 'I'm going to give a Wild West show in this amphitheatre to-morrow week.'

"When he came off the platform, Nixon said to him: 'What the hell do you mean by shouting a performance in my amphitheatre to-morrow week?' 'Oh,' said Buntline, 'that's all right. I'm going to fill the amphitheatre for you, and you'll make a lot of cash.' Nixon laughed: 'By gosh,' he said, 'I like your cheek, but all right, you go ahead.' Ned Buntline wrote the play himself in two nights, and rotten bad it was, but it had Wild West life in it, and he pulled it off immense. We couldn't get Indians from the reservations in the United States in time, so we get them from Canada, and we had a 'devil of a time.' The amphitheatre was full night after night. Ned Buntline was a genius. We left Chicago and went to Niblo's in New York, and we played in New York and the East for months to great success, but we broke up at Louisberg, Missouri, and the last I saw of Ned Buntline, he was blind drunk, walking the streets with Dan Rice, the circus manager, having what might be called 'a way up time.'

"After we broke up at Louisberg, I went to Washington and saw General Custer. I was so mad for adventure that I enlisted in his army—and I became sergeant at once. I didn't know then what a rash fighter Custer was. That's what I meant going to Los Angeles, when I said he was a great man gone wrong—he'd a right to risk his own life, but not those of his soldiers. The Cheyennes, Blackfeet Sioux, Hunkapapas and the rest under Gall, Crazy Horse, Crow King, Black Moon, all great Generals did for him. Well, no more of Custer. He was a great Indian fighter, but he went, and all his men, except me! They did not mutilate him, and he sleeps at West Point. For fifteen years he had been triumphant, but on

the 25th of June, 1876, something triumphed over him. He bit the dust.

"Now about Australia, I knew Sir Daniel Wilson, a rich man, and the owner of racehorses; and his trainer, Alf Drake, said to me one day, 'Frank, I want to borrow £800 from you.' I said to him: 'Drake, you can have £800 if you'll let me train Pasha for the Yam Yam Stakes'.

"He looked surprised, and said: 'Pasha is a valuable horse.' I said: 'I know that.' He said: 'What do you know about horses, Frank?' Well,' I said, 'I know more than you'll ever know. I was brought up on horses, and I'll train Pasha so he'll win the Yam Yam Stakes.' He said 'How will you do it?' I said, 'Never mind, but I'll do it. What I want to know is, will you let me?' He looked me up and down: 'Well,' he said, 'you're taking a lot on your shoulders, and this is not my horse. It's Sir Daniel Wilson's, and if it don't come well out of your hands, he'll get shirty.' 'Well,' said I 'let him get shirty, if you'll let me train Pasha.' He said: 'Give me the £800 down.'

"Now Pasha was a mile horse, a bay with white legs, and very handsome. They'd been training him as a two-miler, and he couldn't stand it. I knew better, so I trained him as a one-miler, and a fine horse he was. As I saw him improve, I decided he'd make a bold bid for the Cup. But Pasha had a brother, Spade Guinea, a bad horse as Pasha was good. Except for the eye they looked alike, as much as twins. I was afraid Spade Guinea would win the race, for he was a devil to go.

"The race began. I was standing where I could see them come it, and, so help me, Pasha lost by half a nose. He had been started at twenty to one, but before the race began rumours brought up the price to within fighting distance of even money. Pasha lost, but I looked up at the Judge's roster, and, so help me, according to it, Pasha had won. I toddled down the course and met my jockey coming in second. 'To the front,' I said, 'Pasha has won!' He shook his head: 'No, he hasn't.' 'To the front!' I said, and with a queer look on his face, for he knew the truth, he went front, and that is how Pasha won the Yam Yam Stakes! The judges were mistaken—that's all—they didn't do it purposely.

"I made money at racing and cards in Australia, but cards is surer than racing. I'd a racing stable in Melbourne, and I took a string of horses to India—whalers, they were, and I came out second for the Viceroy's Cup. I sold all my horses in India. Then I went to China, and I raced with galloways. They are not over fourteen hands high, and I had more or less success, but there's no sure money in racing, and by my expenses in India and China I lost all I'd made in Australia.

"I travelled through Russia, where I used to play cards at noblemen's houses, and in Italy, Spain and France I learned their languages, but I did not learn German—it was too hard. I travelled in Portugal along the Mediterranean, Tangiers, Morocco and the Balearic Islands, and at last I settled down in London, and *most* of the rest you know!"

We had had many talks and some walks together, and this was to be our last meeting, for I was leaving presently for England. We had never spoken of Alice, nor of the events in Paris, in all our talks, for I had carefully avoided it, and I was certain he did not wish it; but our last meeting had come, and I must speak. We sat silent for some time, and I am sure it was in his mind that I was going to say what I did, for a curious troubled look came to his eyes and he smoked faster than usual, and his cigar puffs were like jets from a geyser. I can recall the room where we sat, high up, quiet, though now and then came the snorting of a motor in the street below, and it was moonlight, and the blinds were up, and there were no lights in the room. Yet there was a moon and there was light enough from outside to see the working of his face. It was summer time and we had talked long after dinner.

At last I said to him: "Well, Tarboe, we've come to our last talk together for many a day—how long, who can tell? One page of your experiences we have not read—let us read it now."

He sat up in his chair stiffening, and he looked at me with troubled eyes. "I guess what you're going to say," he said.

"You guess right, Tarboe. *She* died, and you knew!"

For a moment he did not speak, for there passed before his spirit's eye the one great honest, truthful romance of his life. He had never loved but one woman and that love had become a tragedy. His face clouded heavily. "Yes, she died in Kentucky—the only woman I ever truly loved." He

shuddered. "That horrible thing in Paris clouded my life. I never saw her again. When I left the Continental Hotel the sun almost stopped shining for me. You remember our meeting at Havre, and our journey back to Paris? I didn't see how I could go on at all, I was so battered. For years gloom and shame and the terrible memory were with me. If Drew wanted revenge, he had it in my misery, and in the thought that Alice and I would never again in life or time speak to each other, or look into each other's eyes. She hated me now, I know, and yet I loved her as I never had before. I've been through many bad days and dark deeds, but that was the worst of all. The trouble was I couldn't hear from her, and dared not go where she lived. So at last one day in the *New York Times*, I read the notice of her death. For a long time I had to school myself to face the world, and do the daily round."

He sat for a moment staring in front of him, and I did not speak. There was nothing to say. His eyes closed, then opened slowly.

"She is happy now, I know. She was a flower, and, oh boy, she is in the garden that has no end. I remember her, and I live on." He bowed his head.

I did not speak, but reached out and grasped his hand.

¶

MY tale is almost ended. Frank Tarboe might have risen to any heights. In one way he is below the pavement on which we walk, yet not below steadfastness in friendship, courage in time of peril, endurance of misery and imprisonment, and with an honour of his own, he rises higher than many of us. He said to me he could bite a nail in two; so his inner man can bite a nail in two, and beneath the wrong things he has done, and they have been many, there has been an unconquerable soundness of heart and soul. I would sooner have gone to Frank Tarboe in trouble than to any relative of mine, or any friend I ever had. I'm not ashamed to have known him, to have liked him much, and here I have put up on record some of his sins, and his folly; but if we would count sins and folly, how many would stand the test? Perhaps we would not manipulate the cards, but we do not hesitate, in different ways maybe, to manipulate the social life and circumstances in which we move. How many of us can say that we have ever held unchangeably to the truth, that we have never robbed —not money perhaps, but persons or institutions or great national organisations of something? To any critic of my story I say: "If you would see one who has descended low, but has ascended high: 'There is the Man.'"

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NOTE.

WISHING to have the record of Frank Tarboe complete, I wrote to Sir William Horwood, the head of Scotland Yard, in November last, asking for permission to read Frank Tarboe's dossier as it existed in Scotland Yard. Sir William Horwood's reply was that it could not be done, and he used these words at the close of his letter: "Our criminal records are for service use only, and are treated as strictly confidential."

I wrote and thanked him and asked him for the date of the trial, and in the British Museum I read the account of the trial at the Central Criminal Court.

Early in February of this year I wrote to the Right Hon. Sir William Joynson-Hicks, the Home Secretary, in whose department Scotland Yard is included. I had known Sir William Joynson-Hicks many years. I told him of Sir William Horwood's statement. His reply was: "I read your letter with great interest, and only wish I could grant your request, but I really must not. . . . If I could give any novelist this privilege, you may be sure I should be glad to give it to you."

So that was my only connection with the official history of Frank Tarboe.

Blood is Thicker than Water

Romance—and the custom of the country

By PIERRE MILLE

Pierre Mille, world-famous as a literary explorer of strange lands and customs, is known to English readers chiefly by his novels, in which he tilts, now mockingly, now seriously, at social customs. In this gripping short story he deals with a problem of typically French delicacy in a manner at once ironical and graceful.

AS luck would have it, he was seated opposite me at my table in the first-class dining-saloon of the steamer of the Messageries Maritimes, on which we had both embarked at Saigon for Marseilles; a big devil about thirty, with very blue eyes and a face tanned to that faded rust colour—which the sun of the tropics, dyes a fair skin.

When he spoke, which was seldom, he seemed timid—or rather bashful—with a drawling, mountain accent. I soon learned from himself that he was from the Jura, like his three brothers, who remained in Tonkin, on their Red River plantation.

When asked his name, he always answered "Moreau Emile," putting the surname first as do soldiers and men of the people. He came to breakfast in pale blue silk pyjamas, a little showy perhaps, but "rich." At luncheon, he reappeared, like everyone else, in a white linen suit. In the evening, he wore—again like everyone else—a dinner jacket. But he carried this uniform of society awkwardly, as if he had not had time to become accustomed to it. His hands were white enough, save for the tan, but his nails, worn down to the quick, like those of people used to the hardest manual labour, had not been trained to grow properly.

He was, nevertheless, the object of a consideration so evident as to be almost obsequious on the part of the men, and, on the part of the women, of a curiosity which might have gone further than mere sympathy. The passengers coming from Indo-China said: "You know, he's one of the four Moreau brothers, who are making such a pile with their tobacco!" And the English themselves—those who had come aboard at Singapore and Colombo—stared at him with an almost religious admiration, because they had been told: "That chap? Well, he doesn't look a gentleman, perhaps . . . but he has killed thirty-eight tigers, you know! . . ."

With the Englishmen, the matter ended there, because he, Moreau Emile, did not speak a word of English, and the Britons, according to their custom, not a word of French. With me, it was different.

In the first place, it is impossible to sit opposite anyone at meals for more than a month without exchanging a word. And then, Moreau was like myself in one particular. Being invited to join in a game of poker, we both had to confess that it was impossible for us to tell one card from another, if we had more than five in a hand. Then I proposed *écarté*, and he accepted.

Furthermore, we soon recognised that we played a pretty even game—meaning one about as badly as the other—so we could go on day after day without getting discouraged.

One evening, I asked Moreau:

"Tell me, is it true you've killed thirty-eight tigers?"

He mumbled: "Yes!" and looked embarrassed.

It was evident that the conversation was not to his taste and that there was nothing of a Tartarin about him; but, as he wished to be polite, although he had "neither breeding nor learning," he went into profuse details about tobacco farming, native labour, the difficulty of getting it, the local policy of the government of Indo-China, the singular whimsies of the French *Régie*, which was practically the sole customer of Moreau Brothers.

In order to be polite in my turn, I felt obliged to remark:

"I see. You're going to have a lot of business to settle in France?"

"No," he replied, "not so much as all that."

He looked down at his glass—we used to take one or two cocktails while playing—then he was silent. So! Apparently he did not like to talk about his business

affairs either, or at any rate about those not already consummated. That is what I concluded, but I was wrong there, too. And the cocktails loosed his tongue a little.

"The truth is," he said, after a moment, "the truth is, I'm going back home to be married."

I have already said he did not look more than thirty, and it was quite natural that he should have left a sweetheart in his Jura before going off to Indo-China. I hinted as much.

"No," he said, "no . . . I've no one in view, but we've still a few relatives yonder, and they're looking after the matter for me. They've already mentioned several young ladies. Now I'm going to see."

In a word, he was bound, as it were, for the 'marriage market' in his Jura! Nothing very exciting about that, either! However, I continued:

"I understand. Once you have a farm, you must have a wife, a Frenchwoman, from the country if possible. One who understands farming—who likes it. You can't stick for ever to the native girl, the '*petite épouse*' as the Paris people put it." He lowered his eyes again.

"There's something in what you say. A good French housewife—who can exercise her authority. That certainly has good points—it's useful, but the native girl has good points too—absolute submission. 'Yes,' always 'yes' to everything you say. That's agreeable. Convenient and agreeable. I had one, you know."

"You're giving her up?"

He heaved a sort of sigh.

"Well, I had to. My brothers advised it. They were already married to Frenchwomen. At last I understood they were right. It was more prudent, they said, to be married to Frenchwomen."

"More prudent?"

"I'll tell you about it. The story is mixed up with the tigers. It's funny—it sounds a bit mad—but it's mixed up with the tigers in a way . . . Because it was I who killed the tigers on the plantation, you know."

I nodded.

¶

"A LOT of tigers come at night after the cattle. We're obliged to keep a fairly big herd, bullocks and cows, for the tobacco, on account of the manure. To grow tobacco, you must have red soil, a peculiar red which is easily distinguishable—phosphoric soil, it's called—but you must also have manure, a great deal of manure."

Ever since Moreau Emile explained this to me, I have always recalled that his face and hands seemed stained, not only by the tropical sun, but also by the reflection, the impregnation of that red soil.

"So the tigers come to eat the cattle left grazing on the fallow land. And my brothers had said to me: 'You're the youngest, it's your job to get rid of them.'

"You know how it's done? At nightfall, you tie a goat to a stake in a likely spot and you tug a cord fastened about the poor beast's neck, to make it bleat. That's what attracts the tiger. . . . You wait in a mirador, a sort of cabin made of branches perched up in a tree, and then you shoot as well as you can, if you get the chance . . .

"I killed thirty-eight of those tigers. What they say is true, but I didn't like it the thirty-eighth time any better than the first; I was always afraid, stuck up in my mirador. And I think I know why. It was often touch and go; I'm a tobacco planter, not a real hunter who does that sort of thing for sport.

"Well, the thirty-eighth time I had to go, I went. I said to my girl, Thi-Ba: 'To-night, I'm going after tiger. See that the boy prepares some good coffee, a bottle of white wine and a snack when I get in, not forgetting the brandy. The nights are chilly, I'll be cold!'

"She replied: 'Yes, my lord,' as she replied to everything. She was fond of me. I know she was fond of me. To begin with, I'm not a bad chap. I treated her kindly, nicely. You can't change your ways with women, when you're a Frenchman, even if you've neither breeding nor learning, can you?

"In Tonkin, it's a common saying that your native women will always flirt with the 'boy' or some other Annamite behind the Europeans' backs. As for Thi-Ba, I thought it quite possible she might be like the rest, but that didn't interfere with her feelings for me. Come now! Think a bit, if a man can love several women at the same time, why shouldn't a woman love several men? I'd heard there was a certain Nguyen, a village chap, who had wanted to get her before I came along, but I didn't give a damn; it was ancient

history—and I was *I* ! Then Thi-Ba loved me, I knew she did. I knew it from a lot of little things you can't mistake.

" But I told you what she said : ' Yes, my lord ! ' Nothing else ! And she was the same as she was always.

" So there I was, perched up in my mirador on the lookout, just as on other occasions ; a little fidgety, as usual. The moon lighted the fallows and the small trees. Good ! If the tiger should come prowling round, I would not miss him ! The goat, even more fidgety than I, kept up a continual bleating, without my having to pull the cord. Another good thing ! . . . But no sign of the tiger. Was he too well fed, the beast ? He had stolen a calf from us the night before. I'd began the watch at eleven. Midnight. One o'clock. Two. Nothing ! I dozed a bit, and woke up at three. The moon had gone, the night was black, I felt like leaving, but I waited. Little by little, the sky lightened—false dawn. Not a sound—but a movement in the grass, a hundred yards from the goat. I said to myself : ' There he is, the beast ! He's made up his mind at last ! ' The movement continued, the grass bent and he remained flattened behind. At ten yards from the goat—she must be quaking—the movement stopped. It would begin again ! I waited, but it did not. Ah ! good Lord ! Let's have done with it ! It was not the first time I'd fired at a guess. And I knew where he was, the tiger !

" As the animal was so close, I replaced the charge, putting two sawed bullets instead of one, and fired. Not a roar, not a cry ! But I saw the grass bending in the opposite direction. I'd got him ! I'd got him ! Should I follow him up ? I thought of doing so, but what if he had a mate somewhere ? This happens sometimes, and then it's dangerous business.

" I went home.

" Yes, I went back to the house. I opened the door. Thi-Ba was there, she had waited for me. I fancied she looked at me queerly, but only a trifle.

" She asked : ' The tiger ? '

" ' I think I got him. We'll soon see. I'll send out the coolies.' "

" Not another word. I went to bed. I fell asleep. When I woke up, I despatched the trackers. No sign of the tiger. Had I missed him ? That humiliated me for the moment ; then I thought no more of it. All the same, there was blood, a fine smear of blood at the very spot where I had fired.

" Now for the sequel ! I told you I was on the point of forgetting all that. You can't succeed every time . . . I learned that a local native, not an old man, younger than I, had hurt himself on a stake while working in his paddy-field, and had died. I made a gift for his funeral and attended part of the ceremonies. There are a lot of them—you can't lose all your time—and again I forgot all about it. Besides, it had not the slightest interest for me ! Finally, a long time afterwards, I went shooting wild hen and rock-pigeon—by daylight, this time. My ' boy ' accompanied me. I brought down as many as I wanted. The ' boy ' said to me :

" ' Know how shoot, you ? '

" I didn't answer. He went on :

" ' Nguyen-Tri-Phu, you put him two shot. You no see, but him gone out, dead ! '

" Nguyen ? What ? I didn't understand, the boy not being inclined to say more, but I got it out of him by pretending I knew all. This Nguyen-Tri-Phu was the old sweetheart or lover—all one to me !—of my native girl. *He* was the tiger ! He had come with an old musket and was going to fire on me when I forestalled him. Afterwards, he had crawled away to die in his hut . . .

" I had a sudden suspicion. So I spoke as if I were sure :

" ' Thi-Ba knew, naturally ? '

" The boy answered, in his patois, something which signified :

" ' Naturally '

" ' She knew beforehand ? '

" ' Of course. Nguyen had told her.'

" ' And she said nothing ! She bears me no grudge ? '

" ' Thi-Ba ? No grudge you. No grudge at all. She good wife you for always. But no could tell. *No must tell !* '

" There you have it ! They were sweethearts, it's of no consequence. But they were of the same race, from the same village. So : *No must tell !* "

I asked : " But you ? What did you say to Thi-Ba ? "

" I ? Nothing. That wouldn't have mended matters."

" Only my brothers said to me :

" ' Emile, now that you are of age, you should take a wife—a Frenchwoman. It's better, in a way.' That's what I'm going to do. . . . All the same, I miss Thi-Ba a little. . . . "

The Chief of the Golden Hope

A little disagreement and a big test

By CAPT. FRANK H. SHAW

A ROLLING expanse of greasy sea stretched from horizon to horizon in one unbroken plane, save that, far to southward, breaking the immaculate curve, there showed a few dark fangs, like a wolf's teeth. The Solomon Islands, notorious for the cannibalistic proclivities of their inhabitants, lay under the lee of the *Golden Hope* and, even at that illimitable distance, the dull moan of the far-flung surf could be heard stealing through the heavy air, like the rolling thunder of another world. The sun was glooming through a yellowish haze, and far to the north, like a dark line, there was a great cloudbank. A sense as of impending events hung over the tramp steamer, and Captain Sheerpole gnawed his fingers with a new nervousness. He was frankly uneasy, for the falling mercury in the barometer had a queer concave curve on its surface and long experience told the skipper that a typhoon was mustering up its forces for a savage onslaught. The subtle undersea current set resistlessly towards those ugly spikes of rock; but, given a full head of steam and plenty of sea-room, there was no reason why the *Golden Hope* should not weather the impending storm as well as she had weathered a thousand others.

"Losh, but ye have fine times, ye o' the deck staff," said the chief engineer of the steamer as he hove himself up to the bridge deck and left the imprint of his greasy hands on the white rails of the ladder. "Mon, ye'd no believe me, but it's stewin' hot doon ablaw there in the engine-room. A hunner and thirty-five Fahrenheit, as I'm a fully certificated chief."

"Wind and steam can never mix," is the proverb at sea, which means, in plain prose, that the deck staff and those of the engine-room are never inclined to fraternise to any alarming extent. Therefore it is no wonder that Captain Sheerpole smiled somewhat caustically as he replied:

"That's all you greasers can think of, Mac, us of the deck and our soft times. Why, man, you don't know the rudimentary elements of work yet. Never a wet stitch on your backs, never a chill in your marrow, no headwork, nothing to do but sit on the spare crank with your pipe in your mouth and watch the wheels go round! That's what an engineer has to do."

"Ay? So ye think yersel', dootless. Weel, I wouldna mind sayin' ye're a bit off the straight line. No, dinna let yer bearings get overhet; it's no worth. It's maist fatiguin' tae argle-bargle wi' a man o' the deck staff on a hot day." Sheerpole's face had crimsoned somewhat and he just bit back a sharp retort in time. But the coolness and patronage of the chief galled him.

"As a fair comparison," resumed the imperturbable chief with a slow smile, "I wouldna mind assertin' that the average engineer does mair in ane day that an officer does in a month. To say nothin' o' keepin' fractious stokers up tae the mark and cloutin' the ears o' third engineers, who tell ye there's a hot bearin' when it's only the shine o' a hand-lamp on the hot steel, there's mony a calculation that has tae be worked oot tae a far greater nicety than ye o' the deck ever dae it. For instance——"

"Look here, Mac," said the skipper, "what have you come up here for? I like to see you occasionally, but I'm a bit worried at present. The typhoon is working up like a high-press cylinder; and if the current gets any stronger we'll need to fight for it before morning."

"As I was sayin', an engineer must be a man o' pairts. He maun hae the courage o' a Nelson and the determination o' a Napoleon. He maun hae the wit o' Harry Lauder and the gravity o' the Airchbishop o' Canterbury, for-bye I'm a member o' the Free Kirk. The reason o' my promiscuous call on ye, sir, is no tae swap opeenions on the distinctions atween the

taw departments, so much as tae tell ye the high-press cylinder's leakin' badly, an' it'll be necessary tae stop the ship for six hours at least while we effect the necessary repairs. Ye'll understand me diffidence, but it's a fact, and we maun look facts in the face."

"Confound you for a long-winded, dissolute mechanic," cried Sheerpole savagely. "Why ever couldn't you have told me that before? The high-press cylinder out of gear! Why, man, we can't stop. The ship needs all the power that we can muster to weather this howler that's coming up. Here, look here." He took the chief by the elbow and led him to the charthouse, where the barometer hung. Tapping the glass, Sheerpole pointed out its lowness and also drew attention to that ominous curve of the mercury's surface.

"Now, tell me whether you think it's possible to stop her at the present moment."

Mr. Macphee shook his head dubiously. He wiped his black hands on the cotton waste which he invariably carried in lieu of a handkerchief, and then, searching in his pockets, he produced a plug of "Lucky Hit," from which he thoughtfully shredded a pipeful. When the pipe was charged to his liking, he looked up.

"Ye'll no happen to have a match, will ye?" he asked calmly.

"Oh, d—— your Scotch callousness!" roared Sheerpole. "Let's have an understanding at once, Mac. You say the ship's got to be stopped; and I say she can't be stopped. It's more than all our lives are worth to let her lose her way now. She's not making more than four knots ahead at present and the current's setting her four knots south each hour, too; so it's touch and go whether we'll make our way past those blasted rocks even as we are, without that cursed typhoon and the rotten engines to add to our difficulties. My word is the ship's got to keep going for all she's worth. If you say another word about stopping her I'll log you for insubordination."

"Ay, ye'll dae that, I've no doot. But, Captain Sheerpole, apart frae merely professional jealousies, ye're a man I've a great admiration for. Ye're cool in emergency and ye've got yer heid screwed on the right way' Here's ma final word: Gin ye drive thae engines anither thirty minutes, ye'll hae naething in the engine-room but a mass o' twisted shoddy. She'll no stand it."

Sheerpole tore his hair and called upon his gods. The low mutter of the gathering storm sounded like the voice of an angry Jove and the lashing diapason of the surf on the distant rocks sounded like the hissing expectation of a waiting multitude.

"See what you can do in an hour," he said finally. "I'll give you that, but not another minute. If you've not got her to rights in that time, she must blow herself to bits; but I'm going to have way on her."

There was a sudden crash from the engine-room and both the good men started simultaneously. Then the telegraph on the bridge rang rapidly to stop and the thud of the propeller died away. The ship went along a little distance by her own impetus, but before the captain had time to open his mouth she had stopped and only the greasy lap of water against the motionless side answered his thoughts.

"Ay, she's done it," said the chief. "I was expectin' it. Ye will say the engine-room staff's no gude, sir; but ye'll acknowledge a highly skilled mechanic's a vera handy man tae have aboard at this time." And he went on a tour of inspection.

"Sax hours at the very least, wi' safety," said he when he returned. "Ye didna gie me yon match I was aking after. She's stripped the packing completely away; and she's damaged otherwise, tae. She's needin' dry-dockin' maistly, but we maun dae as we can wi' the materials at oor disposal. Ye'll need tae lend me the whole o' the deck staff, I'm thinking."

Sheerpole summoned the mate and gave his orders. Soon there arose from the engine-room the sound of furious hammerings on solid metal, the dull clang of a dropped implement, the screeching yell of a rusty bolt as the great spanners bit home and twisted it from its holding. Spurts of hot oil sizzled up through the open skylight and the sounds of violent cursings rang loudly above the sullen day. And all the time the threatening growl to windward increased in violence and dull flashes of lightning whirled wildly to and fro over the dark, cloudy sky.

Leaving the bridge in charge of a mate, the captain hung agonisedly over the engine-room skylight, only breaking off at times to race to the chart-room and watch the downward-trending barometer. He came back from every observation with a face that grew blacker and blacker, and the strained appearance of his eyes told his

mate that the danger impending was only too real. The steamer lay like a log in the vast expanse. The sun was dropping down its western path and showed a distorted, danger-impending disc. It was flattened to a queer oval and was the colour of a P. and O. liner's boat. The sea was growing troubled now. A long heave from the north had set in and it lifted the ship in its embracing arms, setting her back with a dull squelch; and once a great wave raced madly onwards, rose up the sides of the motionless craft and half-buried her. It was only one, there was no other; but somewhere at the back of that sulphurous curtain to the north there was waiting a whole army of similar waves.

Forgetting the sacredness of the engine-room, Captain Sheerpole raced below and confronted the chief, who was waving a spanner with grim majesty. He had just felled an offending seaman who had complained that he wasn't a minutely particularised artificer and was waiting to see what would come of the action.

"You'll have to get way on her," yelled Sheerpole, snatching at the chief's arm as a drowning man at a straw. "The typhoon'll be down in another twenty minutes and she'll never live. Can't you run her on two cylinders?"

"Can a man twist a universe upside doon?" asked the chief grimly. "We're daein' all we can an' we canna dae more. There's mair damage than I thought for at the first sicht, but we're gettin' on. Anither hour or twa'll mak' a big difference." Captain Sheerpole let go his frenzied hold and simply sobbed. He was madly in love with his calling, but he was vouchsafed a vision in which he saw the pitying sneers of fellow-master-mariners, who would comment on his accident in no measured terms.

Macphee heard that sob and his hard face softened. "Gin it's as bad as a' that," he said emphatically, "we'll dae oor best. Spare me anither thirty minutes an' I'll get way on the bit shippie or—bust!"

He made no boast about what he would do, for, as he said, he was only an engineer. But for the remaining thirty minutes he worked like a dozen men, worked with the sweat hopping down his face like hailstones, till his back seemed breaking at the hips, till his fingers were raw and bleeding with slipped spanners and rusted bars. On and on he toiled, inspiring his men with word and blow, doing as much as they all were doing together; and yet, as the time allotted drew to its close, he looked at his work and shook his head. Nothing but a miracle could bring the engines to a fit condition in time to save the ship, and without the necessary repairs it would be positive madness to make any attempt to drive them. Positive madness—or sublime heroism!

As his heavy hammer dealt blow after sounding blow at implacable masses of chilled steel, Mr. Macphee's brain kept time to the strokes; and the words that sang through his mind were those same words spoken by the captain a little while before: "The average engineer is no earthly use aboard ship." He was showing his utility now if ever a man did and he was wondering if Sheerpole knew it.

"I'm dootin' he'll tak' credit for onything we dae himsel'," muttered the chief, as a wedge fell across his foot with a painful thud. "Sheerpole's aye forrit at takin' credit, forbye he's no blate tae share the blame wi' ony that comes handy. Well, I'll no mind. I ken masel' who's who an' what's what; and I'll dae my best notwithstandin'."

¶

THE storm broke suddenly in spite of the long warning. It seemed as if a sudden vacuum had been created in the sky and a high pillar of water leaped up bodily to fill the void. Then, the whole sea rose boisterously and swept down upon the *Golden Hope* and she staggered at the awful shock.

Those who worked in the engine-room, or held on, with white faces and gripping hands, to anything that would support a man's weight, saw a sudden vision. The skipper, his eyes bloodshot and starting, the blood streaming down his beard where he had bitten through his underlip, tore down the slippery ladder and fairly flung himself on the chief engineer.

"At all costs give us steam!" he yelled loudly, and yet above the frenzied scream of the typhoon his words might have been whispered.

"We're all dead men if you don't," he cried again. And the chief engineer, understanding the gestures if not the words, looked at him for a moment in stern silence. Then he waved his hand around the dismantled engine-room. The motion was self-explanatory and the captain turned away with a groan. Apparently nothing could save the ship.

With a wearied shake of his head he staggered up the dizzy ladder again, warped himself along the decks hand-over-hand until he gained the bridge and then, on all fours, crept to the weather-cloth at the front and peered over. The wind flattened him back against the wheel-house, with the breath knocked clean out of his body. The mate and second mate had disappeared, but a sharp glance showed him them flattened against the funnel, insensible. They had been caught up by the giant hand of the gale and flung like feathers against the iron stack.

The sea was shut out from sight now in a fog of seething foam. It was only made apparent by the low, groaning note that beat through the mad strife, as the typhoon bit off the tops of the waves and flung them sky-high in mad abandon. And the steamer herself was labouring hard, her decks clean-swept, the lifeboats smashed to matchwood, save that one remained, with the after-tackle carried away, so that the boat streamed out to leeward like a flag, until the remaining tackle chafed through and the boat vanished into the inferno overside.

But the *Golden Hope* was safe still. A magnificent sea-boat, she kept her bluff stem up into the eye of the wind and refused to be overwhelmed by the massed might of her opponent. With plenty of sea-room the chances were in her favour still, but there were the fangs of the Solomons to leeward and they were drawing nearer with every slow second that passed. The ship was drifting bodily down upon them and presently, so Sheerpole said, as he lay flat on the bridge planks and peered through a hole he had cut in the weather-cloth, presently she would be lifted like a toy and flung upon those cruel ridges to her unavoidable doom.

A sharp tinkling came to Sheerpole's ears, rising even above the elemental thunder. He could hardly believe his ears, but a sharp look at the engine telegraph told him that the engines were rung to full speed ahead. Then the familiar vibration of the clashing machinery shook the ship from stem to stern. She was moving ahead, she was under steam once more—there was a fragment of hope that she might be saved still.

Understanding nothing of what the chief was doing, but with a great prayer of thankfulness in his heart, Sheerpole wormed his way to the wheel-house and grasped the deserted wheel. He scanned the compass with narrowed eyes and fixed on a course that would take him soonest out of danger; then, with muscles of steel and eyes of fire, he held the kicking helm true.

The men who had been at work in the engine-room were clustered, a wonderful group, in the alleyways on deck. They were still half-dazed, for they had met with a mighty surprise. Ten minutes before, as they groaned and panted below, now holding like grim death to a rail, now making a fitful dash with the hammer or spanner at some work, they had been driven in a body on deck by the chief engineer, whose eyes were afire with a new light.

"On deck, every mother's son of ye!" he had screamed. "Get oot o' the engine-room, ye gowks! Up wi' ye, wull ye no gang? Firemen, intae the stokehold wi' ye like ane man. Gie me every ounce o' steam ye can muster and gie it me quick!"

They had fled before his looks and words, while men muttered that the old Scot was "fey." The second and third engineers had endeavoured to reason with him, to point out the utter futility of his staying in the engine-room, but he drove them from him with harsh words—ay, and with blows—bidding them to the stokehold, to keep the firemen up to their work. They went sadly, for they loved the stern old man who had taught them most of what they knew about their trade.

The great room, filled with shining steel, was deserted by all save Macphee now, and he set himself to do the most heroic thing in his life. He knew that to turn the power into the engines would fill the place with blinding, scalding steam, and that, if the ship were to be driven at all, it was at the cost of the driver's life. But his knotted hands never trembled as he rang the telegraph to the bridge and opened the throttle valve slowly.

There was a hiss of escaping steam that drowned the tumult from above. A smoky cloud dripped out from the leaking cylinders and filled every corner of the vast apartment, impinging cruelly on the man's flesh as he stood resolutely at his post. Little by little he turned the throttle, until the sweeping pistons began their work. The engines were working again. With many a gasp and splutter, with many a wheeze and shudder, they were going round. The ship

was surging unevenly through the awful seas that had been lashed up in a moment; the propeller was more often out of water than under and it was necessary—for Macphee knew well that the keying of the screw was untrustworthy—to stand by the throttle without a break, in order that the mad racing of the shaft might be checked as the steamer's stern lifted to the 'scend of the sea.

Alone in the oscillating room, with the ray of the lamp clattering gauges and sweeping pistons, he stood at his post without a complaint. The skipper's words were forgotten now—he was borne up by a strange mental exaltation that comes to some men at the time of their greatest peril. He was pitting his own feeble strength against the strength of the elusive vapour that he had enslaved for so many years—and he said that he would win the fight or die at his post.

Hot oil and blinding steam were everywhere. The whirling cranks revolved in zoetrope circles of dazzling light, a loosened gauge on the fore column of the engine danced a mad witches' dance to the play of the thrusting monsters; the plates underfoot hove and shook as the *Golden Hope* gathered her way upon her, and breasted the storm with pugnacious courage. And the sound of the hissing steam was deafening. It came sweeping out in vast scalding clouds. It whistled through tiny apertures; it volleyed through open crevices in the loosened packing. It smote with the force of a hammer on the chief's smarting skin and, when he released his grasp of the throttle for a minute to tear away the loose collar that threatened to choke him, strips of his parboiled skin came away with it, leaving the raw and smarting flesh exposed.

He was more than half-blinded now; and a strange, dizzy feeling made him reel. But he never lost his presence of mind and for long hour after long hour he worked the heated throttle, now lessening the steam and now increasing it, as the vessel pitched and wallowed madly. His old face was unrecognisable. He was dully aware that a stream of blood was coursing down his cheeks, where a loosened bolt had flown from its holding and cut him to the bone; but he took no heed. His fingers retained their grasp on the throttle more by instinct than by will-power, for his senses were reeling and he staggered like a drunken man to the lurch of the struggling fabric around him. But he stuck to his post, with a grim courage that defied the end.

On deck chaos reigned supreme. The captain was alone on the bridge, for the mates had not yet recovered from their stunning fall and no man had ventured to ascend the clattering ladders to bear a hand. At the helm, peering through the salt-rimmed glass in front of the wheel-house, with his every nerve tensed to the awful strain, Sheerpole, his brain torn with dread and confused with the ceaseless strife of the wind, kept the ship's head unalterably on her course and prayed silently that he might yet win through.

Once, a sudden lift in the salt-fog that hung like a mantle over the sea, showed him the tooth-like rocks to leeward, and they were very near. But the ship was gallantly holding her own at last and, when the next clearance came in that curtain of gloom, he saw that the vessel was making slow headway past the danger. If only the engines would hold out another hour, the danger would be past.

Using every ounce of his strength and every fraction of his skill, Sheerpole kept her to her course. After his second glance to leeward he never looked in that direction again, for he said that the issue was in Higher Hands than his.

The insidious current took her by the keel and urged her to her immediate destruction, the thunderous gale lifted her bodily and swept her down towards her fate; but the engines never stopped—they lifted her to their thrust and sent her swirling ahead into the very heart of the storm. She was little better than a wreck now. She had been swept of everything that could be moved; huge rents gaped in her bulwarks and the bent and twisted rails of the bridge showed the awful might of the crashing seas. Still she struggled on. She lifted her bow to the rolling combers and trod them underfoot with a remnant of her old saucy pride. She swept her decks with every shuddering roll, but the hurtling water leaped through the gaping bulwarks as soon as it came aboard and did not bear her down.

It was almost dark now. For three long hours the storm had raged with such awful fury that the captain could not believe his own ears when that constant drumming ceased. For a moment he stood dazed in the sudden calm that followed the awful riot; and then, as the salt mist rolled

bodily away and showed a clear and smiling sky, showed, too, the cruel rocks astern and out of reach with ordinary care, he let go the wheel and flung himself down on the deck, sobbing like a woman.

The engine still rumbled on and, in the lull, their pitiful wheezing was plainly to be heard. Recovering himself, Sheerpole rang the telegraph to stop and went along the fiddley to where his officers lay. They were coming back to life slowly. He carried the mate to the bridge and left him there, noticing, as he did so, that, in spite of his signal to the engineer below, the machinery was still rotating at undiminished speed. Then, all suddenly, the clatter died away.

Sheerpole, looking like a man who had fought a bout with Death, went off the bridge and down to the engine-room. The place was full of blinding steam still; but, as his eyes grew accustomed to the haze, the skipper saw the place was empty. But when he cautiously crept across the swirling floor, ankle deep in oil and water, he stumbled over something that lay at the foot of the main column. Then, with a cry, he put down his hand.

Macphee, the chief engineer, had been faithful unto death. The Titanic task well done, he had fallen dead, and his lifeless hand had closed the throttle as he fell.

Travelling: Old Style and New

THE modern modes of travelling cannot compare with the old mail-coach system in grandeur and power. They boast of more velocity, not, however, as a consciousness, but as a fact of our lifeless knowledge, resting upon *alien* evidence; as, for instance, because somebody *says* that we have gone fifty miles in the hour, though we are far from feeling it as a personal experience, or upon the evidence of a result, as that actually we find ourselves in York four hours after leaving London. Apart from such an assertion or such a result, I myself am little aware of the pace. But, seated on the old mail-coach, we needed no evidence of ourselves to indicate the velocity. On this system the word was, *Non magna loquimur*, as upon railways, but *vivimus*. Yes, "magna *vivimus*"; we do not make verbal ostentation of our grandeurs, we realise our grandeurs in act, and in the very experience of life.

The vital experience of the glad animal sensibilities made doubts impossible; we heard our speed, we saw it, we felt it as a thrilling; and this speed was not the product of blind insensate agencies, that had no sympathy to give, but was incarnated in the fiery eyeballs of the noblest amongst brutes, in his dilated nostril, spasmodic muscles, and thundering hoofs. The sensibility of the horse, uttering itself in the maniac light of his eye, might be the last vibration of such a moment; the glory of Salamanca might be first. But the intervening links that connected them, that spread the earthquake of battle into the eyeball of the horse, were the heart of man and its electric thrillings—propagating its own tumults by contagious shouts and gestures to the heart of his servant the horse.

But now, on the new system of travelling, iron tubes and boilers have disconnected man's heart from the ministers of his locomotion. Nile nor Trafalgar has power to raise an extra bubble in a steam-kettle. The galvanic cycle is broken up for ever; man's imperial nature no longer sends itself forward through the electric sensibility of the horse; the inter-agencies are gone in the mode of communication between the horse and his master, out of which grew so many aspects of sublimity under accidents of mists that hid, or sudden blazes revealed, of mobs that agitated, or midnight solitudes that awed. Tidings, fitted to convulse all nations, must henceforward travel by culinary process; and the trumpet that once announced from afar the laurelled mail, heart-shaking when heard screaming on the wind and proclaiming itself through the darkness to every village or solitary house on its route, has now given way for ever to the pot-wallopings of the boiler.

THOMAS DE QUINCEY.

Delights of Harmony

The Charm of Music

THERE is a music wherever there is a harmony, order, or proportion; and thus far we may mention the music of the spheres; for those well-ordered motions are regular paces, though they give no sound to the ear, yet to the understanding they strike a note most full of harmony. Whosoever is harmonically composed delights in harmony, which makes me much distrust the symmetry of those heads which declaim against all church-music. For myself, not only from my obedience but my particular genius, I do embrace it; for even that vulgar and tavern-music which makes one man merry, another mad, strikes in me a deep fit of devotion and a profound contemplation of the first composer. There is something in it of divinity more than the ear discovers: it is an hieroglyphical and shadowed lesson of the whole creatures of God; such a melody to the ear as the whole world, well understood, would afford the understanding. In brief, it is a sensible fit of that harmony which intellectually sounds in the ears of God.

Sir Thomas Browne.

WHERE should this music be? i' th' air or th' earth?
It sounds no more: and, sure, it waits upon
Some god o' th' island. Sitting on a bank,
Weeping again the king my father's wreck,
This music crept by me upon the waters,
Allaying both their fury, and my passion,
With its sweet air: thence I have follow'd it,
Or it hath drawn me rather. But 't is gone.
No, it begins again.

Shakespeare.

From Some Higher Sphere

CAN it be that those mysterious stirrings of heart, and these emotions and strange yearnings after we know not what, and awful impressions from we know not whence, be wrought in us by what is unsubstantial, and comes and goes, and begins and ends in itself? It is not so: it cannot be. No: they have escaped from some higher sphere: they are the outpourings of eternal harmony in the medium of expressed sound: they are echoes from our Home: they are the voices of Angels, or the Magnificat of Saints, or the living laws of Divine Government, or the Divine Attributes; something are they, beside themselves, which we cannot compass, which we cannot utter, though mortal man . . . has the gift of eliciting them.

J. H. Newman.

Musicians Fitted for All Things

I ALWAYS loved music; whoso hath skill in this art, the same is of good kind—fitted for all things. We must of necessity maintain music in schools. A schoolmaster ought to have skill in music, otherwise I would not regard him; neither should we ordain young men to the office of preaching, except they have been well exercised and practised in the school of music. Music is a fair gift of God, and near allied to divinity. I would not for a great matter be destitute of the small skill in music which I have.

Martin Luther.

Unpromised Joys

WHEN my friend commences upon one of those solemn anthems, which, peradventure, struck upon my heedless ear, rambling in the side aisles of the dim abbey, some five and thirty years since, waking a new sense, and putting a soul of old religion into my young apprehension (whether it be *that*, in which the psalmist, weary of the persecution of bad men, wisheth to himself dove's wings—or *that other*, which, with a like measure of sobriety and pathos, inquireth by what means a young man shall best cleanse his mind), a holy calm pervadeth me. I am for the time—"rapt above earth" and possess joys not promised at my birth.

Charles Lamb.

The Science of Music

THAT evening they went to the opera, where Harry was so captivated by the sentimental meltings and varied harmony of the airs, that he requested Mr. Fenton to be permitted to instruct him on some instrument. Not by my advice, my dear, answered Mr. Fenton. I would not wish you to attempt any thing in which you may not excel. Music is a science that requires the application of a man's whole life in order to arrive at any eminence. As it is enchanting in the hand of a master, it is also discordant and grating in its inferior degrees. Your labours have been employed to much more valuable purposes; and I would not, as they say, give my child's time for a song.

Henry Brook.

WHEN whispering strains with weeping wind
Distil soft passions through the heart;
And when at every touch we find
Our pulses beat and bear a part,
When threads can make
A heart-string ache,
Philosophy
Can scarce deny
Our souls are made of harmony.

When unto heavenly joys we faine
Whate'er the soul affecteth most,
Which only thus we can explain
By music of the heavenly host:
Whose lays we think
Made stars to wink,
Philosophy
Can scarce deny
Our souls consist of harmony.

O lull me, lull me, charming air!
My senses rock with wonder sweet;
Like snow on wool thy fallings are;
Soft like a spirit's are thy feet!
Grief who needs fear
That hath an ear?
Down let him lie,
And slumbering die,
And change his soul for harmony.

Strode.

Music Vain or Irresistible

IT (Music) is either the vain noise of a language you do not understand, or it is a vehemence of sentiment, which forces you along with it, and which it is impossible for the soul to resist.

Rousseau.

A Contrary View

SEMIRAMIS would be to me pure misery. I love music very little. I hate acting. I have the worst opinion of Semiramis herself, and the whole thing seems to me so childish and so foolish that I cannot abide it. Moreover, it would be rather out of etiquette for a Canon of St. Paul's to go to the opera; and, where etiquette prevents me from doing things disagreeable to myself, I am a perfect martinet.

Sydney Smith.

LAP me in soft Lydian airs
Married to immortal Verse,
Such as the melting soul may pierce
In notes, with many a winding bout
Of linkèd sweetness long drawn out,
With wanton head, and giddy cunning,
The melting voice thro' mazes running,
Untwisting all the chains that tie
The hidden soul of harmony;
That Orpheus' self may heave his head
From golden slumbers on a bed
Of heapt Elysian flowers, and hear
Such strains as would have won the ear
Of Pluto, to have quite set free
His half-regained Eurydice.

John Milton.

Wind-Musique

WITH my wife to the King's House to see "The Virgin Martyr," the first time it hath been acted a great while; and it is mighty pleasant; not that the play is worth much, but it is finely acted by Beck Marshall. But that which did please me beyond anything else in the whole world, was the wind-musique when the angel comes down; which is so sweet that it ravished me, and indeed, in a word, did wrap up my soul so that it made me really sick, just as I have formerly been when in love with my wife; that neither then, nor all the evening going home, and at home, was I able to think of anything, but remained all night transported, so as I could not believe that ever any musique hath that real command over the soul of a man as this did upon me; and makes me resolve to practise wind-musique, and to make my wife do the like.

Samuel Pepys.

EFTSOONES they heard a most melodious sound,
Of all that must delight a dainty ear,
Such as at once might not on living ground,
Save in this Paradise, be heard elsewhere:
Right hard it was for wight which did it hear,
To read what manner music that must be,
For all that pleasing is to living ear,
Was there consorted in one harmony:
Birds, voices, instruments, winds, waters, all agree.

Edmund Spenser.

The Golden Windmill

Romance—and a memory renewed

By STACY AUMONIER

AT the top of the hill the party halted. It had been a long trek up, and the sun was hot. Monsieur Roget fanned himself with his hat, and his eye alighted on a large pile of cut fern leaves.

"But this will suit me admirably!" he remarked, and he plumped his squat little figure down, and taking out his large English pipe he began to stuff tobacco into it.

"My little one," said his stout wife, "I should not advise you to go to sleep. You know that to do so in the afternoon always gives you an indisposition."

"Oh, la-la! No, no, no. I do not go to sleep, but—the position suits me admirably!" he replied.

"Oh, papa, papa, . . . lazybones!" exclaimed his pretty daughter, Louise. "And if we leave you, you will sleep like a dormouse."

"It is very hot," rejoined the father.

"Leave him alone," said Madame Roget, "and we will go down to that place that looks like an inn, and see whether they will sell us milk. Where is Lisette?"

"Lisette! where should she be?"

And, of course, it was foolish to ask. Lisette, the younger daughter, had been lost in the wood on the way up, with her *fiancé*, Paul Fasquelle. Indeed, the party had all become rather scattered. It is a peculiarity of picnics. Monsieur Roget's eldest son, Anton, was playing at see-saw with his three children on the trunk of a fallen tree. His wife was talking to Madame Aubert, and occasionally glancing up to exclaim:

"Careful, my darlings!"

Monsieur Roget was left alone.

He lighted his pipe, and blinked at the sun. One has to have reached a mature age to appreciate to the full the narcotic seductiveness of good tobacco on the system when the sun is shining and there is no wind. If there is wind, all the pleasant memories and dreams are blown away, but where is no wind the sun becomes a kind, confidential old fellow. He is very, very mature. And Monsieur Roget was mature. He was fifty-nine years old, given to corpulence, rather moist and hot, but eminently comfortable leaning against the pile of ferns. A glorious view across the woods of Fontainebleau lay stretched before him, the bees droned in the young gorse, his senses tingled with a pleasurable excitement, and as a man will, in such moments, he enjoyed a sudden crystallized epitome of his whole life. His struggles, and failures, and successes. On the whole he had been a successful man. If he died to-morrow, his beloved ones would be left in more than comfort. Many thousand francs carefully invested, some house property in the rue Renoir, the three *comestibles* establishments all doing reasonably well.

Things had not always been like that. There had been long years of anxiety, worry and even poverty. He had worked hard and it had been a bitter struggle. When the children *were* children, that had been the anxious time. It made Monsieur Roget shudder to look back on it. But, God be praised, he had been fortunate, very fortunate in his life-companion. During that anxious time, Madame Roget had been patient, encouraging, incredibly thrifty, competent, resourceful, a loyal wife, a very—Frenchwoman. And they had come through. He was now a proud grandfather. Both his sons were doing well, and were married. Lisette was engaged to a very desirable young advocate. Of Louise there need be no apprehension. In fact, everything——

"Name of a dog! that's very curious," suddenly thought Monsieur Roget, interrupting his own pleasant reflections.

And for some minutes he could not determine exactly what it was that was curious. He had been idly gazing at the clump of buildings lower down the hill, whither his wife and daughters had gone in search of milk. Perhaps the perfume of the

young gorse had something to do with it, but as he looked at the buildings he thought:

"It's very familiar, and it's very unfamiliar. In fact, it's gone wrong. They've been monkeying with that gable on the east side, and they've built a new loft over the stables."

But how should he know? What was the gable to him? or he to the gable? He drew in a large mouthful of smoke, held it for some seconds, and then blew it out in a cloud round his head. Where was this? When had he been here before? They had driven out to a village called Pavane-en-Bois, and from there they had walked, and walked, and walked. He may have been here before, and have come from another direction.

"Oo-eh!"

Monsieur Roget was glad that he was alone when he uttered this exclamation, which cannot convey what it is meant to in print. Of course, across there, on the other side of the clearing, was the low, stone wall, and the reliquary with the figure of the Virgin, and doubtless at the bottom of the slope the other side would be—the well.

It was exactly on this spot that he had met Diane—God in heaven! how long ago? Ten, twenty, thirty. Exactly thirty-seven years ago!

And how vividly it could all come back to one!

He was twenty-two then, a slim young man—considered elegant and rather distinguished-looking by some people—an orphan, without either brothers or sisters, the inheritor of a quite substantial competence from his father, who had been a shipbroker at Marseilles. He had gone to Paris to educate himself and to prepare for a commercial career. He was a serious young man, with modest ambitions, rather moody and given to abstract speculations. Paris bewildered him, and he used to escape when he could, and seek solitude in the country. At length he decided that he must settle down to some definite career, and he became articled to a firm of chartered accountants: Messrs. Manson et Cie. He took rooms at a quiet *pension* near the Luxembourg, and there fell in love with his patron's daughter, Lucile, a demure and modest brunette. The affair was almost settled, but not quite. Monsieur Roget, even in those days, was a man who never put his leg over the wall till he had seen the other side. He was circumspect, cautious, and there was, indeed, plenty of time.

And then one day he had found himself on this identical hillock. He could not quite clearly remember how he came to be there. Probably he had come for the day to escape the clamour of Paris. He certainly had no luggage. He was seated on this spot, dreaming and enjoying the view, when he heard a cry coming from the other side of the low, stone wall. He jumped up and ran to it, and lo, on the other side he beheld—Diane! The name was peculiarly appropriate. She was lying there on her side like a wounded huntress. When she caught sight of him she called out:

"Ah, monsieur, will you be so kind to help me? I fear I have sprained my ankle."

Paul Roget leapt the wall and ran to her assistance. (The thought of leaping a wall now made him gasp!) He lifted her up, trembling himself, and making sympathetic little clucks with his tongue.

"Pardon, pardon! Very distressing!" he murmured when she stood erect.

"If monsieur will be good enough to allow me to rest my hand on his shoulder, I shall be able to hop back to the auberge."

"With the greatest pleasure. Allow me."

On the ground was an upturned pail. He remarked:

"Would it distress mademoiselle to stand for one minute, whilst I refill the pail?"

"Oh, no, no," she exclaimed. "Do not inconvenience yourself."

"Then perhaps mademoiselle will allow me to return for the pail?"

"Oh, no, if you please! My father will do it."

She leant on his shoulder and hopped a dozen paces.

"How did it happen, mademoiselle?"

"Imbecile that I am! I think I was dreaming. I had filled the pail and was descending the embankment when I slipped. I tried to step across the pail, but caught my foot in the rim. And then—I don't know quite what happened. I fell. It is the other ankle which I fear I have sprained."

"I am indeed most desolate. Is it far to the inn?"

"You see it yonder, monsieur. It is perhaps ten minutes' walk, but twenty minutes' hop."

She laughed gaily, and Monsieur Roget said, solemnly:

"If I might suggest it—I think it would be more comfortable for mademoiselle if she would condescend to place her arm round my neck."

" It is too good of you."

They proceeded another hundred paces in silence, and then rested against a stile. Suddenly she gave him one of her quick glances and said :

" You are very silent, monsieur."

" I was thinking—how very beautiful the day is."

As a matter of fact, he was not thinking anything of the sort. He was in a fever. He was thinking how very beautiful, adorable, attractive this lovely, wild creature was hanging round his neck. He had never before adventured such an experience. He had never kissed Lucile. Women were an unopened book to him, and lo, suddenly the most captivating of her sex was clinging to him. He felt the pressure of her soft, brown forearm on the back of his neck. Her little teeth were parted with smiles, and she panted gently with the exertion of hopping. Her dark eyes searched his, and appeared to be slightly mocking, amused, interested. " If only I might pick her up and carry her," he thought, but he did not dare to make the suggestion.

Once she remarked :

" Oh, but I am tired," and he thought that she looked at him slily.

The journey must have occupied half an hour, and she told him a little about herself. She lived with her father. Her mother had died when she was a baby. It was quite a small inn, frequented by charcoal-burners and woodmen, and occasionally by visitors from Paris. She liked the country very much but sometimes it was dull—oh, dull, dull, dull !

" Ah, it is sometimes dull, even in Paris," sighed Monsieur Roget.

" You must come and speak to my father, and take a glass of wine," she remarked.

In the forecourt of the inn the father appeared :

" Hullo ! " he exclaimed. " What is all this ? "

He was a rubicund, heavy-jowled gentleman, who by the wheezy exhalations coming from his chest gave the impression of being a chronic sufferer from asthma. Diane laughed.

" I have been through fire and water, my dear," she said. " And this is my deliverer."

She explained the whole episode to the landlord, who shook hands with Paul, and they led the girl into a sitting-room at the back of the café. Paul was somewhat diffident about entering the private apartment, but the landlord wheezed :

" Come in, come in, monsieur. '

They sat Diane down on a sofa, and the landlord pulled off her stocking. In doing so he revealed his daughter's leg as far as the knee. She had a very pretty leg, but the ankle was considerably swollen.

" The ankle is sprained," said the landlord.

" Will you allow me to go and fetch a doctor ? " asked Paul.

" It is not necessary," replied the landlord. " I know all about sprained ankles. When I was in the army I served in the ambulance brigade. We will just bind it up very tight with cold linen bandages. Does it hurt, little one ? "

" Not very—yet. It tingles. I feel that it may. Won't you offer monsieur—I do not know his name—some refreshment ? "

" Monsieur Paul Roget," said that gentleman, bowing. " But please do not consider me. The sufferer must be attended first. Later on, I would like to be permitted to partake of a little lunch in the inn."

While the landlord, whose name was Jules Couturier, was binding up his daughter's ankle, Paul slipped out and returned to the well, filled the pail, and brought it back to the yard of the inn.

" But this is extremely agreeable of you, monsieur," exclaimed the landlord, as he came bustling through the porch. " She will do well. I know all about sprained ankles. Oh, yes ! I have had great experience. I beg you to share a little lunch with us. We are quite simple folk, but I think we may find you an omelette and a ragoût—quite country people, you know ; nothing elaborate."

The lunch was excellent, and Diane had the sofa drawn up to the table, and in spite of the pain she must have been suffering, she laughed and joked, and they were quite a merry party. After lunch he helped to wheel her out into the crab-apple orchard at the back, and he told her all about himself, his life and work, and ambitions. He told her everything, except perhaps about Lucile. And he felt very strange, elevated, excited.

When the evening came he left it till too late to catch the train back to Paris, and the landlord lent him some things, and he stayed the night.

He stayed three nights, and wrote to Messrs. Manson et Cie., and explained that he had gone to Pavane-en-Bois and had been taken ill. He wrote the same thing to Lucile. And during the day he talked to Diane, and

listened to the landlord. Sometimes he would wander into the woods, but he could not bring himself to stay away for long. He brought back armfuls of flowers, which he flung across her lap. He touched her hands and trembled, and at night in bed he choked with a kind of ecstasy and regret. It was horribly distracting. He did not know how to act. He was behaving badly to Lucile, and dishonourably to Manson et Cie. His conscience smote him, but the other little fiend was dancing at the back of his mind. Nothing else seemed to matter. He was mad—madly in love with this little, dark-eyed huntress.

¶

AT the end of three days he returned to Paris, but not till he had promised to come back at the earliest opportunity.

" Perhaps I will go again in August," he sighed in the train. It was then the seventh of June. On the fifteenth of June he was back again in the " Moulin d'Or." Diane was already much better. She could hobble about alone, with the help of two sticks. She was more bewitching than ever. He stayed three weeks, till her ankle was quite well, and they could go for walks together in the woods. And he called her Diane, and she called him Paul. And one day, as the sun was setting, he flung his arms round her and gasped :

" Diane—Diane. I love you ! "

And he kissed her on the lips, and her roguish eyes searched his.

" Oh, you ! " she murmured. " You bad boy—you ! "

" But I love you, Diane. I want you. I can't live without you. You must come away with me. We will get married. We will build a world of our own. Oh, you beautiful ! Tell me you love me, or I shall go mad ! "

She laughed that low, gurgling, silvery laugh of hers.

" What are you saying ? " she said. " How should I know ? I think you are—a nice boy. But I cannot leave my father."

" My dear, he managed all the time you had to lie with your foot up. Don't torture me ! Oh, you must love me, Diane ! I could not love you so much if you didn't love me a little in return."

" Perhaps I do," she said, smiling.

" What is it, then, Diane ? "

" Oh, I don't know. I do not want to marry. I want to be free, to see the world. I am ambitious. I have been to the conservatoire at Louboise. They say I can sing and dance. My father has spent his savings on me."

" Darling, if you marry me, you shall be free. You shall do as you like. You shall dance and sing and see the world. Everything of mine shall be yours, if only you will love me. You must—you must, Diane ! "

" Well—we shall see. Come, father will be anxious."

In July he left his *pension* and moved out to Montmartre. He had never definitely proposed to Lucile, but his expressions of affection had been so definite that he felt ashamed. He spent his holiday in August at the " Moulin d'Or." And Diane promised to marry him " one day."

" Diane," he said, " I will work for you. You have inspired me, I shall go back to Paris and think of you all day, and dream of you all night."

" That won't give you much time to make your fortune, my little cabbage."

" Do not mock me. Where would you like to live ? "

" In Paris, in Nice, in Rome, in Vienna. And then, one day, I would like to creep back here and just live in the 'Moulin d'Or.'"

" 'The Moulin d'Or' ? "

" Oh, we could improve it. We could build an extra wing, with a dancing-hall, and more nice bedrooms, and a garage. We could improve the inn, but we could not improve these beautiful hills. Isn't that true, little friend ? "

" Nothing could be improved where you are. You are perfection."

" Yes, but——"

In September Diane came to Paris. She stayed with an aunt in Parnasse and attended a conservatoire of dancing. And every evening Paul called on her, and took her flowers and chocolates and trinkets. And in the daytime, when the image of Diane's face did not interpose between his eyes and his desk, he worked hard. He meant to work hard and become a rich man, and take Diane to Nice, and Rome, and Vienna, and make the structural alterations to the " Moulin d'Or."

In a few months' time Diane made such progress that she was offered an engagement in the ballet at Olympia. She accepted it, and Paul was consumed with a fever of apprehension. Every night he went to the

performance, waited for her, and escorted her home. But he disliked the atmosphere of the music-hall intensely, and the other girls, Diane's companions—Heaven defend her!

And then she quarrelled with her aunt, and Paul besought her to marry him so that he might protect her. But she prevaricated, and in the end he took some rooms for her, and she consented to allow him to pay for them. She lived there for several weeks alone, only attended by an old concierge, and then she took a friend, Babette Baroche, to share the rooms with her, and Paul still continued to pay. Paul disliked Babette. She was a frivolous, vain, empty-headed little cocotte, and no fit companion for Diane. On occasions Paul discovered other men enjoying the hospitality of the rooms, and they were always of an objectionable sort. And Diane got into debt, and he lent her four hundred francs.

At Christmas-time she was dismissed from her engagement, and in a pervicacious mood she promised to marry him in the spring. Paul was delirious. Nothing was good enough for his Diane, and he engaged a complete flat for her, with the services of an elderly *bonne*. Diane was very grateful and loving, and in the transition Babette was dropped. However, a few weeks after he had signed the lease, she was offered an engagement for a tour, and after a lengthy dispute and many tears, she had her way and accepted it. She was away three months, and Paul was consumed with dread and doubt and gloomy forebodings. On occasions he dashed down to Lyons, or Grenoble, or wherever she happened to be, for the week-end. And he thought that the company she was with were a very fast lot.

"But, my angel," he would exclaim, "only another month or two, and all this will be over. You will be mine for ever and ever."

He was still paying the rent of the flat in Paris, and it was necessary to send Diane flowers and presents wherever she was. It was an expensive time, particularly as, owing to Diane having had her purse stolen just when she was paying off a debt, he had to send her another four hundred francs. She returned at the end of March, and so great had been her success on the tour that an egregious oily manager named Bonnat offered her a part in a new revue. She received a good salary, but the management would not supply her frocks. It was necessary to dress well for this part. It was her first real chance. She ransacked shops in the Rue de Tivoli, and Paul accompanied her. Eventually she spent twelve hundred francs on them, and Paul advanced the money. She only allowed him to do so on the understanding that she paid him back by instalments out of her salary. It is needless to say that she never did so. However, the frocks were a great success, and Diane made a hit. She was undoubtedly talented. She danced beautifully, and she had a gift of imitation. She very quickly became a star, and, of course, a star could not scintillate in the poky little flat she had so far occupied. She moved to a more fashionable quarter, and occupied a flat the rent of which was rather more than her salary alone. She developed more expensive tastes, and nearly always kept a taxi-cab waiting for her at stage-doors and restaurants.

At this time Paul began to realize that he was living considerably above his income. It would be necessary to reduce it by breaking into his capital. He sold some house property and paid Diane's debts, and bought her a pearl pendant.

"Next month she will be my wife," he thought. "And then I shall be able more easily to curb these extravagancies."

But when the next month came Diane was at the height of her success. She had been given more to do in the revue, and her imitations were drawing the town. The management raised her salary. Her head was completely turned.

"Oh! no, no, no! dear heart," she exclaimed. "Not this month. At the end of the season. It would be imbecile, when I have all Paris at my feet."

Paul begged and urged her to reconsider, but she was obdurate. She continued the same life, only that her tastes became more and more extravagant. And one day Paul took her to task.

"My angel-flower," he said, "we must not go on like this. All the savings for our wedding are vanishing. I am eating into my capital. We shall be ruined."

"But, my little love," replied Diane, "I spend so little. Why, you should see the electric brougham Zénie at the Folies Bergères has. Besides, next year, or perhaps before, they will have to double my salary."

"Yes, but in the meantime——"

"In the meantime your little girl shall kiss away your naughty fears."

And, of course, Diane soon had an electric brougham of her own. The more salary she had, the more it seemed to cost Paul. He was receiving merely a nominal salary himself from Messrs. Manson et Cie., where he was little more than a pupil. However, at that time he managed to get a small increase, and he invested a good bulk of his patrimony in a rubber company that a very astute business friend advised him about. If the shares went up considerably he might sell out, and reimburse himself for all these inroads on his capital.

In the meantime a disturbing element crept into his love affair. A depraved young fop, the Marquis de Lavernal, appeared on the scene. He was one of these young men who have plenty of money and frequent stage-doors. He was introduced by Babette, whom he almost immediately forsook for Diane. He called upon her, left more expensive flowers and chocolates than Paul could afford, and one day took her to Longchamps in his car.

Paul was furious.

"This man must not come here," he exclaimed. "I shall kill him!"

"Oo-oh! but why? He is quite a nice boy. He is Babette's friend."

"I don't trust him. I won't have him here. Do you understand, Diane? I love you so, I am distracted when that kind of person speaks to you."

"Oo-oh!"

Diane promised not to see him again alone, but Paul was dubious. The trouble was that he did not know what went on in the daytime. In the evening he could, to a certain extent, protect her. But in the daytime—that raven! that ogre! that bloodsucker! He was the kind of man who had the *entrée* of all theatres, both the back and the front. He went about with parties of girls. Diane explained that it was impossible sometimes not to meet him. He was always with her friends.

At the end of July Paul had a stroke of fortune. The rubber shares he had bought went up with a great boom quite suddenly. He sold out and netted a considerable sum. And then he had a brilliant inspiration. He would tell Diane nothing of this. He had plans of his own.

One day he took the train and went down to see his prospective father-in-law at the "Moulin d'Or." The old man was wheezier than ever, but very cordial and friendly.

"Well, my boy, how goes it?" he asked.

"Excellently," said Paul. "Now, father-in-law, I have a proposition to make. Diane and I are to be married after the summer season. It has always been her ambition to live at the 'Moulin d'Or.' But she has spoken of improvements. I want to suggest to you, with all respect, that you allow me to make those improvements. I would like to do it without her knowing it, and then to bring her down as a great surprise."

"Well, well, very agreeable, I'm sure. And why not? it would be very charming."

"I suggest building a new wing, with a dancing-hall and several nice bedrooms, and a garage, and laying out the gardens more suitably."

"Well, good. It would be very desirable, and conducive to good business. You may rely upon me to assist you in your project, Monsieur Paul."

"I am indeed grateful to you, Monsieur Couturier."

Paul returned to Paris in high spirits. He made plans of the suggested alterations on the back of an envelope, in the train. The next morning he went to an eminent firm of contractors. So feverish was he in his demands that he persuaded them to send a manager down that very day to take particulars and prepare the estimate. The work was commenced the same week.

In the meantime Diane had bought some expensive little dogs, because Fleurie at the Odéon, kept expensive little dogs, and a new silver tea-service, because Lucie Castille at the Moulin Rouge had a silver tea-service. And Paul was surprised because neither of the accounts for these luxuries was sent to him. Diane said she had paid for them herself, but the little demons of jealousy were still gnawing away at his heart.

The revue was to terminate at the end of the third week in August, and Paul said:

"And then, my love, we will marry quickly in Paris, and then we will do the grand tour. We will go to Nice, and Rome, and Vienna, and commence our eternal honeymoon at the 'Moulin d'Or.'"

Diane clapped her hands.

"Won't that be beautiful, my beloved!" she exclaimed, and she twined her sinuous arms around his neck. "Fancy, just you and I at the dear 'Moulin d'Or!' Oh, and then we will go to Venice, and to

Munich. Good gracious, it will be soon time to think about the frocks and trousseau."

Paul's heart swelled. The trousseau! Diane was becoming serious. There had been moments when he had doubted whether she meant to marry him at all, but—the trousseau! Why, yes, the matter must be attended to at once.

They spent three weeks buying Diane's trousseau. Nearly every day she thought of something fresh, some little trifle that was quite indispensable. When the bills came in they amounted to twenty-two thousand francs! Paul was aghast. He had no idea it was possible to spend so much on those flimsy fabrics. And furniture had yet to be purchased. He went to his astute business friend again, and begged for some enticing investment. He was recommended a Nicaraguan Company that was just starting. They had acquired the rights of a new method of refining oil. It was going to be a big thing. With the exception of a sum of money to pay for the improvements at the 'Moulin d'Or,' Paul put practically the whole of his capital into the Nicaraguan Company.

Nearly every day he called at the contractors', or sent frenzied telegrams to Monsieur Couturier to inquire how the work was progressing. At length he received a verbal promise that the whole thing would be completed by about the twentieth of September.

Excellent! That would fit in admirably. It would give him a month's honeymoon with his beautiful Diane, and then one glorious September evening he would drive up the hill, and jumping out of the car in the new drive, he would be able to exclaim:

"Behold! Do not all your dreams come true?"

And Diane would fling her arms round his neck, and the old father would come toddling out and find them in that position, and he would probably weep, and it would all be very beautiful.

A few days later there was a rather distressing incident. Quite on her own responsibility Diane ordered a suite of Louis XVI furniture. They were fabulously expensive copies. Paul had nothing like enough money to pay for it. He did not want to sell his Nicaraguan shares. In fact, he had only just applied for them. He protested vehemently:

"But, my dear, you ought not to have done this! It is ruinous. We cannot afford it."

"But, my Carlo, one must sit down!"

"One need not pay fifteen thousand francs to sit down!"

"Oo-oh!"

Paul knew the evidence of approaching tears, and he endeavoured to stem the tide. In the end he went to a money-lender and borrowed the money at an abnormal rate of interest, and then he went to Diane and said:

"My beloved, you must promise me not to spend any more money without my consent. The consequences may be serious. My affairs are already getting very involved. You must promise me."

Diane promised, and the next day drove up to his office in a great state of excitement. Bonnat had been to see her. They wanted to take the revue for a two months' tour to Brittany and Normandy, commencing at Dinard on August 22nd. He had offered her dazzling terms. She simply must go. It might be her last chance. The wedding must be postponed till the end of October. Paul protested, and they both became angry and cried before two other clerks in Messrs. Manson's office. They parted without anything being settled. When he saw her at night after the theatre she had signed the contract. And Paul returned to his rooms, and bit his pillow with remorse and grief.

¶

ON the twenty-first of August Diane locked up her trousseau, and the furniture, and left with the company for Dinard. And Paul wrote to her every day, and she replied once a week, and occasionally sent him a telegram announcing a prodigious success. Only occasionally did he get an opportunity of going to her over a week-end. The journeys were very long and he resented spending the money. In only one way did he derive any satisfaction from that tour. The building work—like all building work—could not possibly be completed in the time specified. If they had arrived there on the 21st September, his beautiful Diane would have found the place all bricks and mortar and muddle. As it was, it would be comfortably finished by the middle of October.

When not going to Diane he would spend Sunday with Monsieur Couturier, who was keenly excited about the improvement to

his inn. It was going to be very good for business. All the countryside spoke of it. The patron of the "Colonne de Bronze," further down the hill, was furious, and this was naturally a matter of satisfaction to Monsieur Couturier. He was proud of, and devoted to, his future son-in-law.

At the end of September came the great blow. Paul heard of it first through the newspapers. The Nicaraguan Company had failed. The refining process proved efficient but far more expensive to work than any other refining process. The company was wound up and the shareholders received about two and a half per cent. on their investments. Paul was practically ruined. He would have to pay for the building of the "Moulin d'Or." Beyond that he had only a few thousand francs, and he had to meet the promissory note of the moneylenders. He wrote to Diane and confessed the whole story. She sent him a telegram which simply said: "Courage! courage!"

He wore the telegram inside his shirt for three days, till it got rather too dilapidated. Then he concentrated on his work. Yes, he would have courage. He would build up again. Diane trusted him. In any case they could sell the furniture and go and live at the "Moulin d'Or." He wrote her long letters full of his schemes. On October the twelfth the work was completed, and he went down and spent two days and nights with Monsieur Couturier. Diane was to return to Paris on the fifteenth. Monsieur Couturier was full of sympathy and courage They talked far into the night of how they would manage. With the increase of business assured, the inn would, no doubt, support the three of them. There were great possibilities, and Paul was young and energetic. Nothing mattered so long as his Diane believed in him.

The night before he returned to Paris he went for a walk in the woods by himself. He visualized the days to come, the walks with Diane, the tender moments when they held each other's hands; he could see their children toddling hand-in-hand through the woods picking flowers. In an ecstasy he rushed to a thick bush, and picked a bunch of red berries. He would take them to Diane. They would be the symbol of their new life. Wild flowers from their home, not exotic, town-bred things. It was all going to be—joy—joy—joy!

He ran back to the inn, and spent a sleepless night, dreaming of Diane and the days and nights to come.

In the morning came a letter from Messrs. Manson et Cie. His dealings with the moneylenders had been disclosed. His services were no longer desirable.

Well, there it was! It would take more than that to crush him in his ecstatic mood. He would start again. He would begin by helping Monsieur Couturier to run the inn.

He returned to Paris late in the evening. He would go to Diane's flat after she had returned from the theatre. She would be a little sleepy, and comfortable, and comforting. She would wear one of those loose, clinging, silky things, and she would take him in her arms, and he would let down her beautiful dark blue-black hair, and then he would make her a coronet of the red berries. He would make her his queen.

He was too agitated to dine that evening. He walked the streets of Paris, clasping the red berries wrapped in tissue paper. He kept thinking:

"Now she is resting between the acts. Now she is dancing a *pas seul* in the second act. Now she is giving her imitation of Yvette Guilbert. Now she is taking a call. Now the manager speaks to her, congratulating her—curse him! Now she awaits her cue to go on again."

He was infinitely patient. He restrained his wild impetus to rush to the theatre. He hung about the streets. He meant to stage-manage his effect with discretion. He waited some time after the theatre was closed. Then, very slowly, he walked in the direction of the flat. As he mounted the stairs he began to realize that he was very exhausted. He wished that he had not foregone his dinner. However, after the first rapturous meeting with Diane, he would take a glass of wine. Very quietly he slipped the key in the lock, and let himself in. (He had always had a key of Diane's flat, which was, in effect, *his* flat.) Directly he had passed the door he heard loud sounds of laughter. He swore inwardly. How aggravating! Diane had brought home some of her friends! There were evidently a good many of them, from the noise and ribaldry. In the passage were several bottles and glasses. He crept along silently to the portière concealing the salon. He could hear Diane's voice. She was speaking, and between each sentence the company screamed with laughter. Ah! she was entertaining them with one of her famous

imitations. He stood there and listened. He made a tiny crack in the curtain and peeped through. Diane was doing a funny little strut, and speaking in a peculiar way. He listened and watched for three or four minutes before he realized the truth of what he saw and heard. And when he did realize it, he had to exert his utmost will-power to prevent himself from fainting.

The person that Diane was imitating was *—himself!*

The realization seemed to be bludgeoned into him, assisted by a round of ironic cheers. People were calling out:

"Brava! brava! Diane!"

He heard Babette say:

"Where is the little end-of-a-man?"

And Diane's voice reply:

"Oh, he is coming back soon, I believe. I forget when."

A man's voice—he believed it was the Marquis de Lavernal's—exclaimed:

"And when is our Diane going to marry it?"

Diane, very emphatically:

"Do not distress yourself, my dear; he's lost all his money."

A roar of laughter drowned conversation, and Paul groped his way along the passage, still clutching the red berries. He reached the door. Then he reconsidered the matter. He crept back to her bedroom. He placed the berries under the coverlet, and, taking a sheet of paper, he wrote one word on it: "Good-bye."

He placed this on the berries, and then stole out into the night.

Paul was then twenty-two, and his life was finished. He was a crushed and broken man. He wandered the streets of Paris all night. He spent hours grimly watching the enticing waters of the Seine, the friend and comforter of so many broken hearts. At dawn he returned to his own apartment. He slept for several hours and then woke up in a fever. He was very ill for some weeks.

But one must not despair for ever. At the end of that time he pulled himself together, and went out and sought employment. He eventually got a situation as a junior clerk in a wholesale stores, and he went back to live at the old *pension* near the Luxembourg, and he resumed his friendship with Lucile. And in two years' time he married Lucile. And then his life began. His life began. His life began. And lo! here was Lucile walking slowly up the hill, arm-in-arm with her daughter, Louise. Yes, his life began——

"Ah! there you are! What did I say?" exclaimed Louise. "He's been asleep!"

"And we've had such an interesting time," added Madame Roget, panting with exertion. "We've been to the inn."

"And there's such a pretty girl there," continued the daughter. "You'd fall in love with her, papa."

"Is she very dark?" asked Monsieur Roget.

"Yes; she has blue-black hair and beautiful dark eyes."

"Good God!"

"I knew he would be interested. She gave us some milk, and she has been telling us her story. She's quite young, and she owns the inn, although it's very hard work to run it, she says. She has only one woman and a potman. Her mother was a famous actress, who made a lot of money and bought the inn and improved it. She died when Mademoiselle was fifteen."

"Who was her father?"

"I don't know. I rather gather that her father was a bad lot. He died, too."

"How old is she?"

"Not much more than twenty."

"Then her mother must have been fifty-three when she died."

"What makes you say so?"

"Of course she must have been. What happened to the old man?"

"What old man?"

"Her grandfather."

"What are you talking about, papa? I don't believe you're quite awake yet."

"She must have had a grandfather. Everybody has a grandfather."

"Well, of course, but——"

"Then he must be either dead or alive."

"How tiresome you are! We must be going. The others are waiting for us lower down the hill."

Monsieur Roget struggled to his feet, and shook the little dead fronds of fern from his clothes, and his wife dusted him down behind.

"We shall be going back past the inn," she said.

"The inn! Why can't we go the other way?—the way we came."

"Don't be so absurd. What does it matter? The others are awaiting us."

They went slowly down the hill, and came in sight of the "Moulin d'Or."

"Isn't it disgusting," remarked Louise, "how these speculative builders are always spoiling these old inns?"

" I don't see it's spoilt," answered her father petulantly.

" You are ridiculous, papa. Anyone can see the inn isn't half so nice as it was."

As they approached the forecourt of the inn, a girl came out carrying a pail. She had dark eyes, blue-black hair, and a swinging carriage. Yes, yes, there was no doubt about it. She was the spit and image of her mother.

As she approached she smiled pleasantly and said :

" Good evening, mesdames ; a pleasant journey ! Good evening, monsieur."

The ladies returned a friendly greeting, and Monsieur Roget suddenly turned to the girl and said :

" Is your grandfather alive or dead ? "

She continued smiling, and replied :

" I do not remember my grandfather, monsieur."

" No, perhaps not ; it was thirty-seven years ago, and old Couturier was an old man then. Perhaps not."

" Papa, can't you see she's going to the well to fetch water. Why don't you offer to help her ? "

" Eh ? No, I'm not going. Let her fetch it herself ! "

" Papa ! "

They walked on in silence till well out of hearing, when Louise exclaimed :

" Really, papa, I can't understand you. So ungallant ! It's not like you. You ought to have offered to fetch the water for her, even if she refused."

" Eh ? Oh, no, I wasn't going. Very dangerous. You might fall down and sprain your ankle. Oh, no, or she might fall down, or something. It's very slippery up there by the well. You're not going to get me to do it. Let her fetch her own water. Oh, no, no, no, no, no ! "

" Louise dear," remarked Madame Roget, " let us hurry. Your father is most queer. I always warn him, but it is no good. If he sleeps in the afternoon, he always gets an indisposition."

On Mrs. Sapsea's Monument

" AND now, Mr. Jasper," resumes the auctioneer, producing his scrap of manuscript, " Mrs. Sapsea's monument having had full time to settle and dry, let me take your opinion, as a man of taste, on the inscription I have (as I before remarked, not without some little fever of the brow) drawn out for it. Take it in your own hand. The setting out of the lines requires to be followed with the eye, as well as the contents with the mind."

Mr. Jasper complying, sees and reads as follows :

ETHELINDA,
Reverential Wife Of
MR. THOMAS SAPSEA,
Auctioneer, Valuer, Estate Agent, &c.,
Of This City.
Whose Knowledge of the World
Though Somewhat Extensive,
Never Brought Him Acquainted with
A SPIRIT
More Capable of
Looking Up to Him.
STRANGER, PAUSE,
And Ask Thyself the Question,
CANST THOU DO LIKEWISE ?
If Not,
WITH A BLUSH, RETIRE.

* * * * * *

" Admirable ! " quoth Mr. Jasper, handing back the paper.

" You approve, sir ? "

" Impossible not to approve. Striking, characteristic and complete."

The auctioneer inclines his head, as one accepting his due and giving a receipt.

CHARLES DICKENS

DRACULA

By Bram Stoker

Travelling at hot speed, the party of Professor Van Helsing follow close upon the track of Count Dracula, who is being rapidly conveyed to his Castle where he hopes once more to baffle his pursuers by the aid of supernatural powers which, however, can only be exercised at certain times.

DR. SEWARD'S DIARY *(continued)*

NOVEMBER 3.—We heard at Fundu that the launch had gone up the Bistritza. I wish it wasn't so cold. There are signs of snow coming; and if it falls heavy it will stop us. In such case we must get a sledge and go on, Russian fashion.

November 4.—To-day we heard of the launch having been detained by an accident when trying to force a way up the rapids. The Slovak boats get up all right, by aid of a rope, and steering with knowledge. Some went up only a few hours before. Godalming is an amateur fitter himself, and evidently it was he who put the launch in trim again. Finally, they got up the rapids all right, with local help, and are off on the chase afresh. I fear that the boat is not any better for the accident; the peasantry tell us that after she got upon the smooth water again, she kept stopping every now and again so long as she was in sight. We must push on harder than ever; our help may be wanted soon.

MINA HARKER'S JOURNAL

October 31—Arrived at Veresti at noon. The Professor tells me that this morning at dawn he could hardly hypnotise me at all, and that all I could say was: "Dark and quiet." He is off now buying a carriage and horses. He says that he will later on try to buy additional horses, so that we may be able to change them on the way. We have something more than seventy miles before us. The country is lovely, and most interesting; if only we were under different conditions, how delightful it would be to see it all! If Jonathan and I were driving through it alone what a pleasure it would be! To stop and see people, and learn something of their life, and to fill our minds and memories with all the colour and picturesqueness of the whole wild, beautiful country and the quaint people! But, alas!—

Later.—Dr. Van Helsing has returned. He has got the carriage and horses; we are to have some dinner, and to start in an hour. The landlady is putting us up a huge basket of provisions; it seems enough for a company of soldiers. The Professor encourages her, and whispers to me that it may be a week before we can get any good food again. He has been shopping, too, and has sent home such a wonderful lot of fur coats and wraps, and all sorts of warm things. There will not be any chance of our being cold.

. . . . .

We shall soon be off. I am afraid to think what may happen to us. We are truly in the hands of God. He alone knows what may be, and I pray Him, with all the strength of my sad and humble soul, that He will watch over my beloved husband; that whatever may happen, Jonathan may know that I loved him and honoured him more than I can say, and that my latest and truest thought will be always for him

CHAPTER XXVII

MINA HARKER'S JOURNAL

NOVEMBER 1.—All day long we have travelled, and at a good speed. The horses seem to know that they are being kindly treated, for they go willingly their full stage at best speed. We have now had so many changes and find the same thing so constantly that we are encouraged to think that the journey will be an easy one. Dr. Van Helsing is laconic; he tells the farmers that he is hurrying to Bistritz, and pays them well to make the exchange of horses. We get hot soup, or coffee, or tea; and off we go. It is a lovely country; full of beauties of all imaginable kinds, and the people are brave, and strong, and simple, and seem full of nice qualities. They are *very, very* superstitious. In the first house where we stopped, when the woman who served us saw the scar on my forehead, she crossed herself and put out two fingers towards me, to keep off the evil eye. I believe they went to the trouble of putting an extra amount of garlic into our food; and I can't abide garlic. Ever since then I have taken care not to take off my hat or veil, and so have escaped their suspicions. We are travelling fast, and as we have no driver with us to carry tales, we go ahead of scandal; but I daresay

that fear of the evil eye will follow hard behind us all the way. The Professor seems tireless; all day he would not take any rest, though he made me sleep for a long spell. At sunset time he hypnotised me, and he says that I answered as usual "Darkness, lapping water and creaking wood;" so our enemy is still on the river. I am afraid to think of Jonathan, but somehow I have now no fear for him, or for myself. I write this whilst we wait in a farmhouse for the horses to be got ready. Dr. Van Helsing is sleeping. Poor dear, he looks very tired and old and grey, but his mouth is set as firmly as a conqueror's; even in his sleep he is instinct with resolution. When we have well started I must make him rest whilst I drive. I shall tell him that we have days before us, and he must not break down when most of all his strength will be needed. . . . All is ready; we are off shortly.

November 2, morning.—I was successful, and we took turns driving all night; now the day is on us, bright though cold. There is a strange heaviness in the air—I say heaviness for want of a better word; I mean that it oppresses us both. It is very cold, and only our warm furs keep us comfortable. At dawn Van Helsing hypnotised me; he says I answered "Darkness, creaking wood and roaring water," so the river is changing as they ascend. I do hope that my darling will not run any chance of danger—more than need be; but we are in God's hands.

November 2, night.—All day long driving. The country gets wilder as we go, and the great spurs of the Carpathians, which at Veresti seemed so far from us and so low on the horizon, now seem to gather round us and tower in front. We both seem in good spirits; I think we make an effort each to cheer the other; in the doing so we cheer ourselves. Dr. Van Helsing says that by morning we shall reach the Borgo Pass. The houses are very few here now, and the Professor says that the last horses we got will have to go on with us, as we may not be able to change. He got two in addition to the two we changed, so that now we have a rude four-in-hand. The dear horses are patient and good, and they give us no trouble. We are not worried with other travellers, and so even I can drive. We shall get to the Pass in daylight; we do not want to arrive before. So we take it easy, and have each a long rest in turn. Oh, what will to-morrow bring to us? We go to seek the place where my poor darling suffered so much. God grant that we may be guided aright, and that He will deign to watch over my husband and those dear to us both, and who are in such deadly peril. As for me, I am not worthy in His sight. Alas! I am unclean to His eyes, and shall be until He may deign to let me stand forth in His sight as one of those who have not incurred His wrath.

MEMORANDUM BY ABRAHAM VAN HELSING

NOVEMBER 4.—This to my old and true friend John Seward, M.D., of Purfleet, London, in case I may not see him. It may explain. It is morning, and I write by a fire which all the night I have kept alive—Madam Mina aiding me. It is cold, cold; so cold that the grey heavy sky is full of snow, which when it falls will settle for all winter as the ground is hardening to receive it. It seems to have affected Madam Mina; she has been so heavy of head all day that she was not like herself. She sleeps, and sleeps, and sleeps! She, who is usual so alert, have done literally nothing all the day; she even have lost her appetite. She make no entry into her little diary, she who write so faithful at every pause. Something whisper to me that all is not well. However, to-night she is more *vif*. Her long sleep all day have refresh and restore her, for now she is all sweet and bright as ever. At sunset I try to hypnotise her, but alas! with no effect; the power has grown less and less with each day, and to-night it fail me altogether. Well, God's will be done—whatever it may be, and whithersoever it may lead!

Now to be historical, for as Madam Mina write not in her stenography, I must, in my cumbrous old fashion, that so each day of us may not go unrecorded.

We got to the Borgo Pass just after sunrise yesterday morning. When I saw the signs of the dawn I got ready for the hypnotism. We stopped our carriage, and got down so that there might be no disturbance. I made a couch with furs, and Madam Mina, lying down, yield herself as usual, but more slow and more short time than ever, to the hypnotic sleep. As before, came the answer: "Darkness and the swirling of water." Then she woke, bright and radiant, and we go on our way and soon reach the Pass. At this time and place she become all on fire with zeal; some new guiding power be in her manifested, for she point to a road and say:—

"This is the way."

"How know you it?" I ask.

"Of course I know it," she answer, and with a pause, add: "Have not my Jonathan travel it and wrote of his travel?"

At first I think somewhat strange, but soon I see that there be only one such by-road. It is used but little, and very different from the coach road from Bukovina to Bistritz, which is more wide and hard, and more of use.

So we came down this road; when we meet other ways—not always were we sure that they were roads at all, for they be neglect and light snow have fallen—the horses know and they only. I give rein to them, and they go on so patient. By-and-by we find all the things which Jonathan have note in that wonderful diary of him. Then we go on for long, long hours and hours. At the first, I tell Madam Mina to sleep; she try, and she succeed. She sleep all the time; till at the last, I feel myself to suspicious grow, and attempt to wake her. But she sleep on, and I may not wake her though I try. I do not wish to try too hard lest I harm her; for I know that

she have suffer much, and sleep at times be all—in—all to her. I think I drowse myself, for all of sudden I feel guilt, as though I have done something; I find myself bolt up, with the reins in my hand, and the good horses go along jog, jog, just as ever. I look down and find Madam Mina still asleep. It is now not far off sunset time, and over the snow the light of the sun flow in big yellow flood, so that we throw great long shadow on where the mountain rise so steep. For we are going up, and up; and all is oh! so wild, as though it were the end of the world!

Then I arouse Madam Mina. This time she wake with not much trouble, and then I try to put her to hypnotic sleep. But she sleep not, being as though I were not. Still I try and try, till all at once I find her and myself in dark; so I look round, and find that the sun have gone down. Madam Mina laugh, and I turn and look at her. She is now quite awake, and look so well as I never saw her since that night at Carfax when we first enter the Count's house. I am amaze, and not at ease then; but she is so bright and tender and thoughtful for me that I forget all fear. I light a fire, for we have brought supply of wood with us, and she prepare food while I undo the horses and set them, tethered in shelter, to feed. Then when I return to the fire she have my supper ready. I go to help her; but she smile, and tell me that she have eat already—that she was so hungry that she would not wait. I like it not, and I have grave doubts; but I fear to affright her, and so I am silent of it. She help me and I eat alone; and then we wrap in fur and lie beside the fire, and I tell her to sleep while I watch. But presently I forget all of watching; and when I sudden remember that I watch, I find her lying quiet, but awake, and looking at me with so bright eyes. Once, twice more the same occur, and I get much sleep till before morning. When I wake I try to hypnotise her; but alas! though she shut her eyes obedient, she may not sleep. The sun rise up, and up, and up; and then sleep come to her too late, but so heavy that she will not wake. I have to lift her up, and place her sleeping in the carriage when I have harnessed the horses and made all ready. Madam still sleep, and sleep; and she look in her sleep more healthy and more redder than before. And I like it not. And I am afraid, afraid, afraid!—I am afraid of all things—even to think; but I must go on my way. The stake we play for is life and death.

¶

NOVEMBER 5, morning.—Let me be accurate in everything, for though you and I have seen some strange things together, you may at the first think that I, Van Helsing, am mad—that the many horrors and the so long strain on nerves has at the last turn my brain.

All yesterday we travel, ever getting closer to the mountains, and moving into a more and more wild and desert land. There are great frowning precipices and much falling water, and Nature seemed to have held sometime her carnival. Madam Mina still sleep and sleep; and though I did have hunger and appeased it, I could not waken her—even for food. I began to fear that the fatal spell of the place was upon her, tainted as she is with that Vampire baptism. "Well," said I to myself, "if it be that she sleep all the day, it shall also be that I do not sleep at night." As we travel on the rough road, for a road of an ancient and imperfect kind there was, I held down my head and slept. Again I waked with a sense of guilt and of time passed, and found Madam Mina still sleeping, and the sun low down. But all was indeed changed; the frowning mountains seemed further away, and we were near the top of a steep-rising hill, on summit of which was such a castle as Jonathan tell of in his diary. At once I exulted and feared; for now, for good or ill, the end was near. I woke Madam Mina, and again tried to hypnotise her; but alas! unavailing till too late. Then, ere the great dark came upon us—for even after down-sun the heavens reflected the gone sun on the snow, and all was for a time in a great twilight—I took out the horses and fed them in what shelter I could. Then I make a fire; and near it I make Madam Mina, now awake and more charming than ever, sit comfortable amid her rugs. I got ready food: but she would not eat, simply saying that she had not hunger. I did not press her, knowing her unavailingness. But I myself eat, for I must needs now be strong for all. Then, with the fear on me of what might be, I drew a ring so big for her comfort, round where Madam Mina sat; and over the ring I passed some of the Wafer, and I broke it fine so that all was well guarded. She sat still all the time—so still as one dead; and she grew whiter and ever whiter till the snow was not more pale; and no word she said. But when I drew near, she clung to me, and I could know that the poor soul shook her from head to feet with a tremor that was pain to feel. I said to her presently, when she had grown more quiet:—

"Will you not come over to the fire?" for I wished to make a test of what she could. She rose obedient, but when she have made a step she stopped, and stood as one stricken.

"Why not go on?" I asked. She shook her head, and, coming back, sat down in her place. Then, looking at me with open eyes, as of one waked from sleep, she said simply:—

"I cannot!" and remained silent. I rejoiced, for I knew that what she could not, none of those that we dreaded could. Though there might be danger to her body, yet her soul was safe!

Presently the horses began to scream, and tore at their tethers till I came to them and quieted them. When they did feel my hands on them, they whinnied low as in joy, and licked at my hands and were quiet for a time. Many times through the night did I come to them, till it

arrive to the cold hour when all nature is at lowest; and every time my coming was with quiet of them. In the cold hour the fire began to die, and I was about stepping forth to replenish it, for now the snow came in flying sweeps and with it a chill mist. Even in the dark there was a light of some kind, as there ever is over snow; and it seemed as though the snow-flurries and the wreaths of mist took shape as of women with trailing garments. All was in dead, grim silence, only that the horses whinnied and cowered, as if in terror of the worst. I began to fear—horrible fears; but then came to me the sense of safety in that ring wherein I stood. I began, too, to think that my imaginings were of the night, and the gloom, and the unrest that I have gone through, and all the terrible anxiety. It was as though my memories of all Jonathan's horrid experience were befooling me; for the snowflakes and the mist began to wheel and circle round, till I could get as though a shadowy glimpse of those women that would have kissed him. And then the horses cowered lower and lower, and moaned in terror as men do in pain. Even the madness of fright was not to them, so that they could break away. I feared for my dear Madam Mina when these weird figures drew near and circled round. I looked at her, but she sat calm, and smiled at me; when I would have stepped to the fire to replenish it, she caught me and held me back, and whispered, like a voice that one nears in a dream, so low it was:—

"No! no! Do not go without. Here you are safe!" I turned to her, and looking in her eyes, said:—

"But you? It is for you that I fear!" whereat she laughed—a laugh low and unreal, and said:—

"Fear for *me!* Why fear for me? None safer in all the world from them than I am," and as I wondered at the meaning of her words, a puff of wind made the flame leap up, and I see the red scar on her forehead. Then, alas! I knew. Did I not, I would soon have learned, for the wheeling figures of mist and snow came closer, but keeping ever without the Holy circle. Then they began to materialise, till—if God have not take away my reason, for I saw it through my eyes—they were before me in actual flesh the same three women that Jonathan saw in the room, when they would have kissed his throat. I knew the swaying round forms, the bright hard eyes, the white teeth, the ruddy colour, the voluptuous lips. They smiled ever at poor dear Madam Mina; and as their laugh came through the silence of the night, they twined their arms and pointed to her, and said in those so sweet tingling tones that Jonathan said were of the intolerable sweetness of the water-glasses:—

"Come, sister. Come to us. Come! Come!" In fear I turned to my poor Madam Mina, and my heart with gladness leapt like flame; for oh! the terror in her sweet eyes, the repulsion, the horror, told a story to my heart that was all of hope. God be thanked she was not, yet, of them. I seized some of the firewood which was by me, and holding out some of the Wafer, advanced on them towards the fire. They drew back before me, and laughed their low horrid laugh. I fed the fire, and feared them not; for I knew that we were safe within our protections. They could not approach me, whilst so armed, nor Madam Mina whilst she remained within the ring, which she could not leave no more than they could enter. The horses had ceased to moan, and lay still on the ground; the snow fell on them softly, and they grew whiter. I knew that there was for the poor beasts no more of terror.

And so we remained till the red of the dawn began to fall through the snow-gloom. I was desolate and afraid, and full of woe and terror; but when that beautiful sun began to climb the horizon life was to me again. At the first coming of the dawn the horrid figures melted in the whirling mist and snow; the wreaths of transparent gloom moved away towards the castle, and were lost.

Instinctively, with the dawn coming, I turned to Madam Mina, intending to hypnotise her; but she lay in a deep and sudden sleep, from which I could not wake her. I tried to hypnotise through her sleep, but she made no response, none at all; and the day broke. I fear yet to stir. I have made my fire and have seen the horses; they are all dead. To-day I have much to do here, and I keep waiting till the sun is up high; for there may be places where I must go, where that sunlight, though snow and mist obscure it, will be to me a safety.

I will strengthen me with breakfast, and then I will to my terrible work. Madam Mina still sleeps; and, God be thanked! she is calm in her sleep. . . .

Jonathan Harker's Journal

NOVEMBER 4, evening.—The accident to the launch has been a terrible thing for us. Only for it we should have overtaken the boat long ago; and by now my dear Mina would have been free. I fear to think of her, off on the wolds near that horrid place. We have got horses, and we follow on the track. I note this whilst Godalming is getting ready. We have our arms. The Szgany must look out if they mean fight. Oh, if only Morris and Seward were with us. We must only hope! If I write no more Good-bye, Mina! God bless and keep you.

Dr. Seward's Diary

November 5.—With the dawn we saw the body of Szgany before us dashing away from the river with their leiter-waggon. They surrounded it in a cluster, and hurried along as though beset. The snow is falling lightly and there is a strange excitement in the air. It may be our own excited

feelings, but the depression is strange. Far off I hear the howling of wolves; the snow brings them down from the mountains, and there are dangers to all of us, and from all sides. The horses are nearly ready, and we are soon off. We ride to death of some one. God alone knows who, or where, or what, or when, or how. . . .

Dr. Van Helsing's Memorandum

NOVEMBER 5, afternoon.—I am at least sane. Thank God for that mercy at all events, though the proving it has been dreadful. When I left Madam Mina sleeping within the Holy circle, I took my way to the castle. The blacksmith hammer which I took in the carriage from Veresti was useful; though the doors were all open I broke them off the rusty hinges, lest some ill-intent or ill-chance should close them, so that being entered I might not get out. Jonathan's bitter experience served me here. By memory of his diary I found my way to the old chapel, for I knew that here my work lay. The air was oppressive; it seemed as if there was some sulphurous fume, which at times made me dizzy. Either there was a roaring in my ears or I heard afar off the howl of wolves. Then I bethought me of my dear Madam Mina, and I was in terrible plight. The dilemma had me between his horns. Her, I had not dare to take into this place, but left safe from the Vampire in that Holy circle; and yet even there would be the wolf! I resolve me that my work lay here, and that as to the wolves we must submit, if it were God's Will. At any rate it was only death and freedom beyond. So did I choose for her. Had it but been for myself the choice had been easy; the maw of the wolf were better to rest in than the grave of the Vampire!

I knew that there were at least three graves to find—graves that are inhabit; so I search, and search, and I find one of them. She lay in her Vampire sleep, so full of life and voluptuous beauty that I shudder as though I have come to do murder. Ah, I doubt not that in old time, when such things were, many a man who set forth to do such a task as mine, found at the last his heart fail him, and then his nerve. So he delay, and delay, and delay, till the mere beauty and the fascination of the wanton Un-Dead have hypnotise him; and he remain on, and on, till sunset come, and the Vampire sleep be over. Then the beautiful eyes of the fair woman open and look love, and the voluptuous mouth present to a kiss—and man is weak. And there remain one more victim in the Vampire fold; one more to swell the grim and grisly ranks of the Un-Dead! . . .

There is some fascination, surely, when I am moved by the mere presence of such an one, even lying as she lay in a tomb fretted with age and heavy with the dust of centuries, though there be that horrid odour such as the lairs of the Count have had. Yes, I was moved—I, Van Helsing, with all my purpose and with my motive for hate—I was moved to a yearning for delay which seemed to paralyse my faculties and to clog my very soul. It may have been that the need of natural sleep, and the strange oppression of the air were beginning to overcome me. Certain it was that I was lapsing into sleep, the open-eyed sleep of one who yields to a sweet fascination, when there came through the snow-stilled air a long, low wail, so full of woe and pity that it woke me like the sound of a clarion. For it was the voice of my dear Madam Mina that I heard.

Then I braced myself again to my horrid task, and found by wrenching away tomb-tops one other of the sisters, the other dark one. I dared not pause to look on her as I had on her sister, lest once more I should begin to be enthral; but I go on searching until, presently, I find in a high great tomb as if made to one much beloved that other fair sister which, like Jonathan, I had seen to gather herself out of the atoms of the mist. She was so fair to look on, so radiantly beautiful, so exquisitely voluptuous, that the very instinct of man in me, which calls some of my sex to love and to protect one of hers, made my head whirl with new emotion. But, God be thanked, that soul-wail of my dear Madam Mina had not died out of my ears; and, before the spell could be wrought further upon me, I had nerved myself to my wild work. By this time I had searched all the tombs in the chapel, so far as I could tell; and as there had been only three of these Un-Dead phantoms around us in the night, I took it that there were no more of active Un-Dead existent. There was one great tomb more lordly than all the rest; huge it was, and nobly proportioned. On it was but one word

DRACULA.

This then was the Un-Dead home of the King-Vampire, to whom so many more were due. Its emptiness spoke eloquent to make certain what I knew. Before I began to restore these women to their dead selves, I laid in Dracula's tomb some of the Wafer, and so banished him from it, Un-Dead, for ever.

Then began my terrible task, and I dreaded it. Had it been but one, it had been easy, comparative. But three! To begin twice more after I had been through a deed of horror; for if it was terrible with the sweet Miss Lucy, what would it not be with these strange ones who had survived through centuries, and who had been strengthened by the years; who would, if they could, have fought for their foul lives. . . .

Oh, my friend John, but it was butcher work; had I not been nerved by thoughts of other dead, and of the living over whom hung such a pall of fear, I could not have gone on. I tremble and tremble even yet, though till all was over, God be thanked, my nerve did stand. Had I not seen the repose in the first face, and the gladness that stole over it just ere the final dissolution came, as realisation that the soul had been won,

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MY DEAR BOY IF EVER IM FEELING BELOW PAR.

LIVERISH.

OR SUFFER FROM INDIGESTION.

BILIOUS HEADACHE.

THAT TIRED FEELING.

DEPRESSION.

I TAKE

Beecham's Pills

THE NATIONAL MEDICINE

AND I'M SOON FIT AND WELL AGAIN.

I could not have gone further with my butchery. I could not have endured the horrid screeching as the stake drove home; the plunging of writhing form, and lips of bloody foam. I should have fled in terror and left my work undone. But it is over! And the poor souls, I can pity them now and weep, as I think of them placid each in her full sleep of death, for a short moment ere fading. For, friend John, hardly had my knife severed the head of each, before the whole body began to melt away and crumble into its native dust, as though the death that should have come centuries agone had at last assert himself and say at once and loud "I am here!"

Before I left the castle I so fixed its entrances that never more can the Count enter there Un-Dead.

When I stepped into the circle where Madam Mina slept, she awoke and, seeing me, cried out in pain that I had endured too much.

"Come!" she said, "come away from this awful place! Let us go to meet my husband, who is, I know, coming towards us." She was looking thin and pale and weak; but her eyes were pure and glowed with fervour. I was glad to see her paleness and her illness, for my mind was full of the fresh horror of that ruddy Vampire sleep.

And so with trust and hope, and yet full of fear, we go eastward to meet our friends—and *him*—whom Madam Mina tell me that she *know* are coming to meet us.

Mina Harker's Journal

NOVEMBER 6.—It was late in the afternoon when the Professor and I took our way towards the east whence I knew Jonathan was coming. We did not go fast, though the way was steeply downhill, for we had to take heavy rugs and wraps with us; we dared not face the possibility of being left without warmth in the cold and the snow. We had to take some of our provisions, too, for we were in a perfect desolation, and, so far as we could see through the snowfall, there was not even the sign of a habitation. When we had gone about a mile, I was tired with the heavy walking and sat down to rest. Then we looked back and saw where the clear line of Dracula's castle cut the sky; for we were so deep under the hill whereon it was set that the angle of perspective of the Carpathian mountains was far below it. We saw it in all its grandeur, perched a thousand feet on the summit of a sheer precipice, and with seemingly a great gap between it and the steep of the adjacent mountain on any side. There was something wild and uncanny about the place. We could hear the distant howling of wolves. They were far off, but the sound, even though coming muffled through the deadening snowfall, was full of terror. I knew from the way Dr. Van Helsing was searching about that he was trying to seek some strategic point, where we would be less exposed in case of attack. The rough roadway still led downwards.

In a little while the Professor signalled to me, so I got up and joined him. He had found a wonderful spot, a sort of natural hollow in a rock, with an entrance like a doorway between two boulders. He took me by the hand and drew me in: "See!" he said, "here you will be in shelter; and if the wolves do come I can meet them one by one." He brought in our furs, and made a snug nest for me, and got out some provisions and forced them upon me. But I could not eat; to even try was repulsive to me.

He looked very sad, but did not reproach me. Taking his field-glasses from the case, he stood on the top of the rock, and began to search the horizon. Suddenly he called out:—

"Look! Madam Mina, look! look!" I sprang up and stood beside him on the rock; he handed me his glasses and pointed. The snow was now falling more heavily, and swirled about fiercely, for a high wind was beginning to blow. However, there were times when there were pauses between the snow-flurries, and I could see a long way round. From the height where we were it was possible to see a great distance; and far off, beyond the white waste of snow, I could see the river lying like a black ribbon in kinks and curls as it wound its way. Straight in front of us and not far off—in fact so near that I wondered we had not noticed before—came a group of mounted men hurrying along. In the midst of them was a cart, a long leiter-waggon which swept from side to side, like a dog's tail wagging, with each stern inequality of the road. Outlined against the snow as they were, I could see from the men's clothes that they were peasants or gipsies.

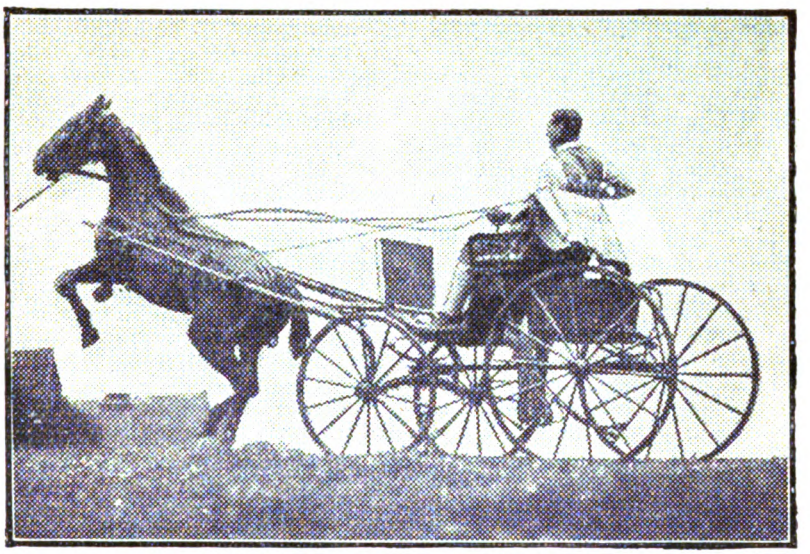
On the cart was a great square chest. My heart leaped as I saw it, for I felt that the end was coming. The evening was now drawing close, and well I knew that at sunset the Thing, which was till then imprisoned there, would take new freedom and could in any of many forms elude all pursuit. In fear I turned to the Professor; to my consternation, however, he was not there. An instant later, I saw him below me. Round the rock he had drawn a circle, such as we had found shelter in last night. When he had completed it he stood beside me again, saying:—

"At least you shall be safe here from *him*!" He took the glasses from me, and at the next lull of the snow swept the space below us. "See," he said, "they come quickly; they are flogging the horses, and galloping as hard as they can." He paused and went on in a hollow voice:—

"They are racing for the sunset. We may be too late. God's will be done!" Down came another blinding rush of driving snow, and the whole landscape was blotted out. It soon passed, however, and once more his glasses were fixed on the plain. Then came a sudden cry:—

(*Continued on Page* 148)

Wonderful Nerve and Steady Hand due to PHOSFERINE



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Look! Look! Look! See, two horsemen follow fast, coming up from the south. It must be Quincey and John. Take the glass. Look, before the snow blots it all out!" I took it and looked. The two men might be Dr. Seward and Mr. Morris. I knew at all events that neither of them was Jonathan. At the same time I *knew* that Jonathan was not far off, looking around I saw on the north side of the coming party two other men, riding at break-neck speed. One of them I knew was Jonathan, and the other I took, of course, to be Lord Godalming. They, too, were pursuing the party with the cart. When I told the Professor he shouted in glee like a schoolboy, and, after looking intently till a snowfall made sight impossible, he laid his Winchester rifle ready for use against the boulder at the opening of our shelter. "They are all converging," he said. "When the time comes we shall have the gipsies on all sides." I got out my revolver ready to hand, for whilst we were speaking the howling of wolves came louder and closer. When the snowstorm abated a moment we looked again. It was strange to see the snow falling in such heavy flakes close to us, and beyond, the sun shining more and more brightly as it sank down towards the far mountain tops. Sweeping the glass all around us I could see here and there dots moving singly and in twos and threes and larger numbers—the wolves were gathering for their prey.

Every instant seemed an age whilst we waited. The wind came now in fierce bursts, and the snow was driven with fury as it swept upon us in circling eddies. At times we could not see an arm's length before us; but at others as the hollow-sounding wind swept by us, it seemed to clear the air-space around us so that we could see afar off. We had of late been so accustomed to watch for sunrise and sunset, that we knew with fair accuracy when it would be; and we knew that before long the sun would set.

It was hard to believe that by our watches it was less than an hour that we waited in that rocky shelter before the various bodies began to converge close upon us. The wind came now with fiercer and more bitter sweeps, and more steadily from the north. It seemingly had driven the snow-clouds from us, for, with only occasional bursts, the snow fell. We could distinguish clearly the individuals of each party, the pursued and the pursuers. Strangely enough those pursued did not seem to realise, or at least to care, that they were pursued; they seemed, however, to hasten with redoubled speed as the sun dropped lower and lower on the mountain tops.

Closer and closer they drew. The Professor and I crouched down behind our rock, and held our weapons ready; I could see that he was determined that they should not pass. One and all were quite unaware of our presence.

All at once two voices shouted out to "Halt!" One was my Jonathan's, raised in a high key of passion; the other, Mr. Morris's strong resolute tone of quiet command. The gipsies may not have known the language, but there was no mistaking the tone, in whatever tongue the words were spoken. Instinctively they reined in, and at the instant Lord Godalming and Jonathan dashed up at one side and Dr. Seward and Mr. Morris on the other. The leader of the gipsies, a splendid-looking fellow, who sat his horse like a centaur, waved them back, and in a fierce voice gave to his companions some word to proceed. They lashed the horses, which sprang forward; but the four men raised their Winchester rifles, and in an unmistakable way commanded them to stop. At the same moment Dr. Van Helsing and I rose behind the rock and pointed our weapons at them. Seeing that they were surrounded, the men tightened their reins and drew up. The leader turned to them and gave a word, at which every man of the gipsy party drew what weapon he carried, knife or pistol, and held himself in readiness to attack.

The leader, with a quick movement of his rein, threw his horse out in front, and pointing first to the sun—now close down on the hill-tops—and then to the castle, said something which I did not understand. For answer, all four men of our party threw themselves from their horses and dashed towards the cart. I should have felt terrible fear at seeing Jonathan in such danger, but that the ardour of battle must have been upon me as well as the rest of them; I felt no fear, but only a wild, surging desire to do something. Seeing the quick movement of our parties, the leader of the gipsies gave a command; his men instantly formed round the cart in a sort of undisciplined endeavour, each one shouldering and pushing the other in his eagerness to carry out the order.

In the midst of this I could see that Jonathan on one side of the ring of men, and Quincey on the other, were forcing a way to the cart; it was evident that they were bent on finishing their task before the sun should set. Nothing seemed to stop or even to hinder them. Neither the levelled weapons or the flashing knives of the gipsies in front, or the howling of the wolves behind, appeared to even attract their attention. Jonathan's impetuosity, and the manifest singleness of his purpose, seemed to overawe those in front of him; instinctively they cowered aside and let him pass. In an instant he had jumped upon the cart, and, with a strength which seemed incredible, raised the great box, and flung it over the wheel to the ground. In the meantime, Mr. Morris had had to use force to pass through his side of the ring of Szgany. All the time I had been breathlessly watching Jonathan I had, with the tail of my eye, seen him pressing desperately forward, and had seen the knives of the gipsies flash as he won a way through them, and they cut at him. He parried with his great bowie knife, and at first

(*Continued on Page* 150)

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I thought that he, too, had come through in safety; but as he sprang beside Jonathan, who had by now jumped from the cart, I could see that with his left hand he was clutching at his side, and that the blood was spurting through his fingers. He did not delay notwithstanding this, for as Jonathan, with desperate energy, attacked one end of the chest, attempting to prise off the lid with his great Kukri knife, he attacked the other frantically with his bowie. Under the efforts of both men the lid began to yield; the nails drew with a quick screeching sound, and the top of the box was thrown back.

By this time the gipsies, seeing themselves covered by the Winchesters, and at the mercy of Lord Godalming and Dr. Seward, had given in and made no further resistance. The sun was almost down on the mountain tops, and the shadows of the whole group fell long upon the snow. I saw the Count lying within the box upon the earth, some of which the rude falling from the cart had scattered over him. He was deathly pale, just like a waxen image, and the red eyes glared with the horrible vindictive look which I knew too well.

As I looked, the eyes saw the sinking sun, and the look of hate in them turned to triumph.

But, on the instant, came the sweep and flash of Jonathan's great knife. I shrieked as I saw it shear through the throat; whilst at the same moment Mr. Morris's bowie knife plunged into the heart.

It was like a miracle; but before our very eyes, and almost in the drawing of a breath, the whole body crumbled into dust and passed from our sight.

I shall be glad as long as I live that even in that moment of final dissolution there was in the face a look of peace, such as I never could have imagined might have rested there.

The Castle of Dracula now stood out against the red sky, and every stone of its broken battlements was articulated against the light of the setting sun.

The gipsies, taking us as in some way the cause of the extraordinary disappearance of the dead man, turned, without a word, and rode away as if for their lives. Those who were unmounted jumped upon the leiter-waggon and shouted to the horsemen not to desert them. The wolves, which had withdrawn to a safe distance, followed in their wake, leaving us alone.

Mr. Morris, who had sunk to the ground, leaned on his elbow, holding his hand pressed to his side; the blood still gushed through his fingers. I flew to him, for the Holy circle did not now keep me back; so did the two doctors. Jonathan knelt behind him and the wounded man laid back his head on his shoulder. With a sigh he took, with a feeble effort, my hand in that of his own which was unstained. He must have seen the anguish of my heart in my face, for he smiled at me and said:—

"I am only too happy to have been of any service! Oh, God!" he cried suddenly, struggling up to a sitting posture and pointing to me, "it was worth this to die! Look!"

The sun was now right down upon the mountain top, and the red gleams fell upon my face, so that it was bathed in rosy light. With one impulse the men sank on their knees, and a deep and earnest "Amen" broke from all as their eyes followed the pointing of his finger as the dying man spoke:—

"Now God be thanked that all has not been in vain! See! the snow is not more stainless than her forehead! The curse has passed away!"

And, to our bitter grief, with a smile and in silence, he died, a gallant gentleman.

Note by Jonathan Harker

Seven years ago we all went through the flames; and the happiness of some of us since then is, we think, well worth the pain we endured. It is an added joy to Mina and to me that our boy's birthday is the same day as that on which Quincey Morris died. His mother holds, I know, the secret belief that some of our brave friend's spirit has passed unto him. His bundle of names links all our little band of men together; but we call him Quincey.

In the summer of this year we made a journey to Transylvania, and went over the old ground which was, and is, to us so full of vivid and terrible memories. It was almost impossible to believe that the things which we had seen with our own eyes and heard with our own ears were living truths. Every trace of all that had been was blotted out. The castle stood as before, reared high above a waste of desolation.

When we got home we got to talking of the old time—which we could all look back on without despair, for Godalming and Seward are both happily married. I took the papers from the safe where they have been ever since our return so long ago. We were struck with the fact, that in all the mass of material of which the record is composed, there is hardly one authentic document; nothing but a mass of type-writing, except the later note-books of Mina and Seward and myself, and Van Helsing's memorandum. We could hardly ask any one, even did we wish to, to accept these as proofs of so wild a story. Van Helsing summed it all up as he said, with our boy on his knee:—

"We want no proofs; we ask none to believe us! This boy will some day know what a brave and gallant woman his mother is. Already he knows her sweetness and loving care; later on he will understand how some men so loved her, that they did dare much for her sake."

The End.

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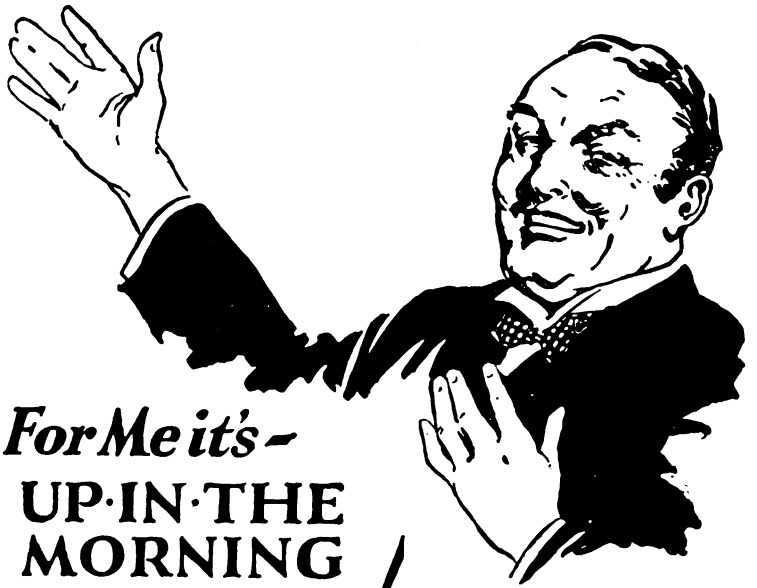

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¶ Miss Sheila Kaye-Smith's exquisite little book of poems and plays under the title of " Saints in Sussex," not only reveals the inwardness of Sussex, but also shows how versatile are the gifts of this famous author. The ten poems are dedicated to the Saints of Sussex and are of singular beauty, both in expression and rhythm. The plays also are of Sussex life, and will be read with deep interest by lovers of Sussex lore.

¶ To write on unconventional lines the story of a crime mystery and its elucidation without introducing the omniscient " sleuth," is a noteworthy achievement which has been accomplished by Mrs. Champion de Crespigny in " The Missing Piece." The tale is invested with quiet humour and the characters are drawn so deftly that they move through the story as real and lovable human beings. With its secret well maintained and revealed at the end in a totally unexpected manner, this is a book that will give readers many a joyous thrill.

¶ "An Old Man's Folly," by Floyd Dell, is a character novel rich in humour and romance. The central figure in the book is Mr. Windle, who is one of those rare characters in fiction, whose vagaries and whims are always remembered. Himself a failure in life, he nevertheless makes great efforts to adjust the lives and loves of some young people and he does actually succeed in securing happiness for others. The book is full of kindly and lovable people and is written with an intensity of feeling which hypnotises the reader.

¶ In his latest novel, " Doomsday," Warwick Deeping depicts his characters with consummate skill and great delicacy of touch. The author presents a living drama set in the beautiful surroundings of the countryside with an ex-Army officer as the chief character. Captain Furze becomes the owner of Doomsday Farm and meets Mary Viner, with the result that a great affection grows up between these two. They eventually make a compact which might shock Mrs. Grundy, but which is essentially pure and leads ultimately to wedded bliss.

THE ARGOSY

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To A Poet A Thousand Years Hence

By JAMES ELROY FLECKER

I WHO am dead a thousand years,
And wrote this sweet archaic song,
Send you my words for messengers
The way I shall not pass along.

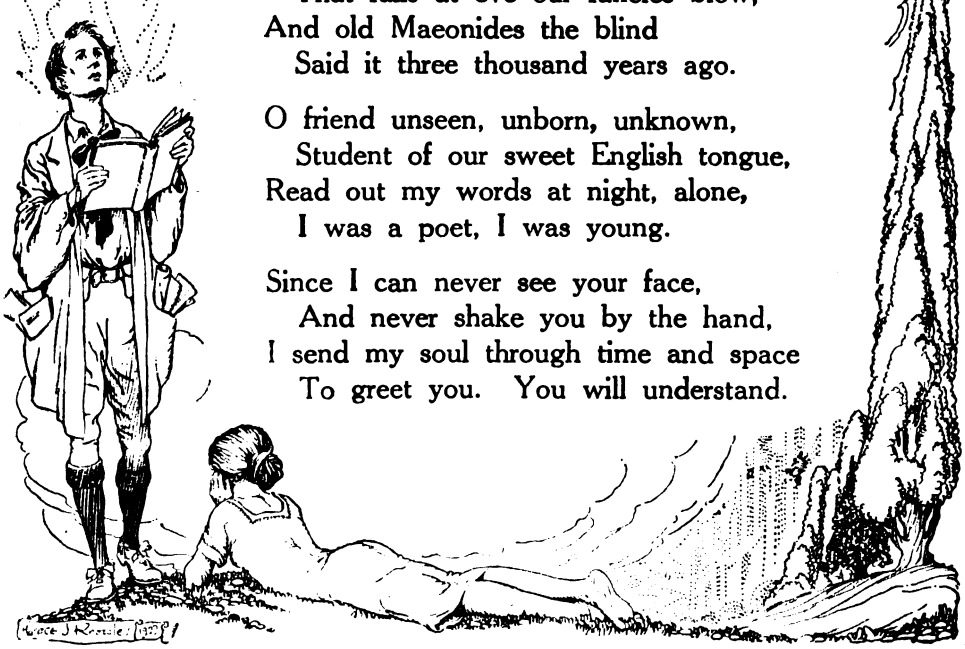
I care not if you bridge the seas,
Or ride secure the cruel sky,
Or build consummate palaces
Of metal or of masonry.

But have you wine and music still,
And statues and a bright-eyed love,
And foolish thoughts of good or ill,
And prayers to them that sit above?

How shall we conquer? Like a wind
That falls at eve our fancies blow,
And old Maeonides the blind
Said it three thousand years ago.

O friend unseen, unborn, unknown,
Student of our sweet English tongue,
Read out my words at night, alone,
I was a poet, I was young.

Since I can never see your face,
And never shake you by the hand,
I send my soul through time and space
To greet you. You will understand.



The ARGOSY
The WORLD'S BEST STORIES

Vol. 1.—No. 10. MARCH, 1927

Did Kressler Kill His Wife?

A matter for conjecture

By H. de VERE STACPOOLE

THE boat-train was drawing into Victoria, and Kressler, seated in the corner of a smoking-carriage and strapping a bag, was finishing a conversation about orchids.

The party of the second part in this conversation, a stout little man looking bored and stiff, was exchanging a travelling cap for a bowler, trying to arrange his thoughts in a fitting manner to meet London after fifteen years' absence in India, and, at the same time, not to appear rude.

"Of course," said Kressler, "all those variations taking the forms of insects and beetles, and so on, are due simply to modifications of the pieces of the floral envelopes. The envelopes are constructed irregularly upon a ternary type and have three exterior and three interior pieces. The exterior pieces are less brightly coloured than the interior, and the two lateral ones are often of a somewhat different form from the other. If I had a pencil and bit of paper I could explain better."

"It don't matter," said the little man hurriedly. "I take your meaning.—Well, here we are at last." He let the window down on the platform side, and as the train came to a standstill, hailed a porter.

Kressler did the same.

"Not that," said Kressler. "I'll take that myself." He referred to a parcel in the rack overhead, a brown canvassed parcel that bore the stamp of the East as well as the initials "J. K."

When his luggage had been arranged on and about two taxis, Kressler got into the first, disposed the J. K. parcel on one of the front seats, tipped the porter half a crown and said, "26a, Pont Street."

Kressler was forty-seven years of age, a lean, tanned, nervous individual with a heavy moustache and the eyes of a fanatic; he had one idea with a double string, and one hobby—the Orchidaceæ and the Coleoptera.

His glass-houses at Kniveton down in Bucks covered acres; his town house at 26a, Pont Street had almost the atmosphere of a glass-house, due to the heating of a great conservatory at its back, a conservatory where choice specimens of the terrestrial ophrydeæ of pleurothallis, and other marvels held court and received old pre-war German professors from Tubingen, orchid fanatics from America, men from Kew.

His collections of beetles were unique. Men laughed at Kressler for diverting part of his great wealth into the collection and cultivation of these forms. Had he taken up with race-horses or broken himself over theatres, they would have reckoned him sane enough, but for a man to devote his life to beetles and orchids! Maybe they were right, seeing that Kressler devoted to these things an ambition that might have made him Prime Minister, had it been properly coupled with his will power and wealth; seeing also that he was married to a charming little fluffy-headed woman whom he left now and then for months and months, whilst he was off on one of his

mad slants in pursuit of his heart's desire. He was just back now from the Solomon Islands, by way of India, after an absence of nine months.

The cabs stopped at No. 26a, Pont Street. Kressler ran up the steps, rang and was admitted by Burden. Burden, though of the breed of the old English side-whiskered butler, had still something floral about him, caught, maybe, from his environment. In form he suggested a bulb; his head, in shape, suggested a tulip.

"Got my wire?" asked Kressler.

"Yes, sir," replied Burden, taking his master's hat and making to take the parcel he carried.

"Don't bother," said Kressler. "Where's your mistress?"

"The mistress said she'd be back before you came, sir. She went to the New Burlington Art Club Reception."

"Tea-party thing?" asked Kressler.

"Yes, sir, I believe so."

Kressler looked at his watch; it pointed to ten minutes past five.

"Well," he said, "you can tell her I'm in the library when she comes. See to my luggage, and have those cases of specimens put somewhere dry."

He crossed the hall, and Burden, slipping before him, opened the door of the library.

It was a pleasant room with a window giving upon the conservatory. On the centre table lay a pile of letters, circulars, seed catalogues, bulb catalogues — a monstrous pile that had already been dealt with by his secretary.

Kressler pointed to the letters.

"Shove those on the side table," said he.

Then, placing the parcel he carried on the table before him, he sat down and drew a penknife from his pocket whilst Burden closed the door.

Kressler opened the penknife and began carefully to rip the sewing of the canvas cover. This done, and the cover removed, he came upon a layer of dried moss, bound around with thin strips of bamboo. Something of the sun and mystery of the tropics seemed to emanate from the vaguely scented bundle which Kressler now began to work upon with his knife, dividing the bamboo strips and tearing the moss apart till he reached the core: a huge bronze-coloured beetle, dried and conserved by the "moss process," the wing edges bright as gold.

Gathering the moss together, he threw the canvas cover into the fireplace. Then, turning to the table, he sat down before the beetle.

There were plenty of beetles in the packing-cases that Burden was unshipping from the taxis, but there was no beetle like this for beauty and strangeness either in the packing-cases or the whole known world.

He repacked the thing carefully in the moss, placed it on top of a bureau by the window, and taking his seat on a chair to rest, he fell into a momentary reverie. He saw again the sunlight of the South, smelt again the perfume of the forests, the heady, dank, dreamy smell of liantasse in swinging cables, cassi in golden flower, vanilla beans, and earth that like a red magician lurked behind the gorgeous arras, building trees, twisting vine cables, painting flowers, globing fruit, creating insects of the strangest pattern.

The door opened, and to the dreamer thus engaged little Mrs. Kressler came in.

She wore a broad-brimmed hat and she held the programme of the New Burlington Art Club in her hand.

¶

"MARY!" cried Kressler, rising to meet and kiss her.

"I knew I'd be late," said she. "I left in time, but the taxi broke down and I had a dispute, and—oh, John, how brown you are! Let me look at you in the light—brown as a coffee-berry, and so tired-looking. Have you had tea?"

"No."

"Then come along—I've tons to tell you."

She had. Over the tea-cups in the dining-room—she had ordered an egg to be boiled for his tea—she told him the kitchen chimney at Kniveton had taken it into its head to smoke; how the Laceys were going to be divorced; how Uncle George's rheumatism was; and how much she had paid a new modiste for the gown she was wearing—one-fifth of what Paquin would charge.

John listened, wiping the tea from his long moustache, and interested, despite himself and the fact that she was not talking about orchids or the coleoptera.

Nine months in the wilder places of the earth give one an appetite for things homely and simple, and the doings of the great, even of the greatest, would have had but

little appeal for Kressler, who found such interest on the doings of the sweep at Kniveton and the misdoings of the Lacys.

After tea they went to the drawing-room, where she played for him whilst he smoked a cigarette; then they had dinner, and after dinner they 'phoned for the electric brougham and went to the Gaiety.

Going to bed, Kressler peeped into the library to see that the beetle was all right. He did not lock it away, it wanted plenty of air after its journey, dry, warm air, such as that of the library. He fetched a newspaper and folded it into a sort of mattress so that air might get to the under side of his treasure, then having smoked a last cigarette, he went to bed.

The most extraordinary thing about the Kresslers, or perhaps the most ordinary thing, was the fact that Mrs. Kressler existed in a different world from her husband. They lived together, laughed, walked, talked and ate together, but they didn't think together. This little woman, who had something of the comfortable appearance of a dormouse, had scarcely an idea of the ambit or object of Kressler's activities. He went sometimes to foreign place to collect "specimens," his orchid-houses were the finest in England, he was very proud of them. This she knew, nor searched for further knowledge, content with the fact that he was a good if sometimes absent husband, never bothering about her commonplace doings, and allowing her seven hundred a year for pin-money.

So it came about that next morning at nine o'clock, and just after her husband had left the house for Kew on important business, Mrs. Kressler, floating into the library and seeing some dirty-looking moss lying on an old newspaper on the bureau and some canvas in the grate, called the housemaid, who was dusting the hall, and told her to remove them.

¶

KRESSLER came home for luncheon at one o'clock, bringing Professor Skeines with him.

Mrs. Kressler was out, attending a sale at Derry and Toms, so they had the table and the conversation to themselves, with a bottle of old Madeira.

Skeines' conversation was about as interesting as the contents of a bulb catalogue to the uninitiated, but Kressler seemed to enjoy it, even though it was not all about orchids.

He listened with seeming interest whilst Skeines pulled Professor Pullman's monograph on the *Hexandria* to pieces, pointing out with devilish derision his inclusion amongst the *Liliaceæ* of a rush that had no place there, with seeming interest, for suddenly in a pause of the talk he prised Skeines from his subject as one prises a limpet from a rock, and fastened him on to the coleoptera.

"And now I'll show you something worth seeing," said Kressler, rising from the table. He left the room, leaving the door ajar, and old Skeines, pouring out another glass of Madeira, heard him cross the hall to the library. Then he heard the voice of Kressler crying aloud for Jane, whoever Jane might be, and the voice of a female making answer:

"The missus told me to throw it out, sir."

Skeines pricked up his ears; a long silence followed the simple announcement. Then came Kressler's voice:

"Told you to throw it out!"

"Yes, sir; that and some old stuff that was in the grate."

"Told you—to—throw—it—out! Where to?—What?—Which? Where the—where did you throw it?"

"All the rubbish goes into the dust-bin, sir."

"All the rubbish—but this was not rubbish! Can't you understand?—the only golden stag in the world! Great Scott! where's the dust-bin?"

"In the area, sir; but it will have been emptied by this."

"Emptied—where?"

"Into the dust-cart, sir."

"What dust-cart?"

"The one that comes every day, sir."

"Where does it come from?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Great Scott! Great Scott! Where's Burden?"

"The missus sent him to Harrods, sir, to match some Japanese lamp-shades."

"Lamps, lamp-shades!—Great Scott! Does the cook know? Run down and ask her, quick! Tell her what's happened—quick!"

Old Skeines, vastly interested and withal amused as one at a tragic play where the acting is perfect, poured himself out another glass of Madeira and sat listening to the uneasy footsteps in the hall.

Skeines was unmarried, and his always fair estimate of his own wisdom was not diminished either in volume or intensity by the domestic tragedy unfolding to his ears.

He thought of the *Lilium Skeinesensi* which a foolish wife might have boiled, mistaking it for an onion; of his essay "On the relation of the stamen to the calyx as determining the poisonous nature of certain plants," of which matrimony might have made jam-pot lids.

Then suddenly came the voice of Jane.

"Please, sir, the cook says the dustman called at twelve as usual and she doesn't know where he comes from, but it's the London County Council does the work, she believes, and——"

"Where's my hat?"

"Here, sir."

Skeines heard the hall door opened, a passing taxi being hailed, Kressler's voice crying, "Spring Gardens," and the hall door shut.

He was not annoyed at being forgotten in this manner by his host; he knew. He finished the Madeira, smoked a cigarette, and then he too departed.

¶

IT was not till four o'clock on the following day that Kressler returned home for good. After definite knowledge of the fruitlessness of his quest had come the recognition of defeat and a feeling of abandonment. He had dined at his club, reviewing—as he ate the food he could not taste—the men he had interviewed, high officials and dustmen, the things he had seen, from dust-carts to dust destructors, and the great fact that his quest was hopeless. He drifted into the Alhambra, and returned home at one o'clock in the morning. He listened to the easy breathing, speaking of the sleep of the just, that came from his wife's bedroom, then he stole off to his own room, and after an early breakfast next morning started for Richmond, where Skeines lived.

He did not want to meet his wife. He dreaded what he might say. He recognised that it was not all her fault, not her fault that she had been born with a mind destitute of interest in the things that really mattered, a commonplace, frivolous mind; yet he did not want to meet her. He did not want to think of her. If she had destroyed the thing in a temper he might have forgiven her more easily than he could forgive her for this passionless, stupid crime, born of want of interest in his aspirations and doings.

Luncheon with Skeines and a blow in the park, however, had a cooling effect, and by the time of his return home, about four o'clock, he was not only able to think calmly about his wife but he was actually anxious to meet her; to meet her and punish her by telling her exactly what she had done, and in language that a child could understand.

"The mistress is in the drawing-room, sir," said Burden.

She was. Placid and content. Tea had just been brought in, and as Kressler entered she was in the act of pouring out a cup. Calm and evidently without any sense of special wrong-doing.

"John," said Mrs. Kressler, as though suddenly remembering, "I'm so sorry. Jane tells me that old thing you left in the library and that old canvas in the grate oughtn't to have been thrown out. I told her to——"

"I know," said Kressler. "It was a beetle—there's no use in bothering about it. Two lumps, please."

He took his cup and sat down, and Mrs. Kressler, nothing loth, turned the conversation in another direction. She knew nothing of the wild incidents of yesterday; Mary had simply said that the master had seemed put out. He still seemed put out, so she started to draw him away from himself with light gossip, and with such apparent success that she was surprised when, tea over and the things removed, Kressler, returning to the subject like the biblical dog, said:

"I want to talk to you, Mary, about that thing; sit down here beside me on the sofa. I want to tell you the story of it so that you may see exactly what it meant to me."

"Yes, dear," said Mrs. Kressler. Fetching the half-knitted jumper she was at work on, she sat down beside him on the broad comfortable sofa, and he began.

"You remember, or maybe you don't remember, that before starting I had engaged a collector to meet me at Rangoon."

"I remember something about that," said Mrs. Kressler, "because you got so

angry with me when I asked you what he was going to collect."

"If I got angry," said Kressler, "it was simply because the fact was obvious: that the expedition being in search of new specimens of certain endogenous plants grouped under the name Orchidaceæ and certain new forms of life, we were going to collect those, if possible. Well, I met this man at Rangoon. Simmonds was his name. I had engaged him on good credentials; an hour's conversation with him confirmed them. Here was no hired collector—would you mind putting those knitting-needles aside, dear? their movements rather interrupt me—here was no man paid for doing a job; here was a man with a passionate attachment to his subject, a man whose life had been spent in the wilder places of the world in pursuit of science. He was a remarkable man, even in personal appearance, not unlike Burden in figure and face, if one can imagine Burden with an intellect and some inches shorter in stature; but the thing that struck me most was his head. It was very large, quite enormous, making him a subject of ridicule, indeed, to boys and dull-witted persons.

"He had already obtained for me an option upon a schooner of sixty tons, the *Madras*, owned by a Dutch gentleman of the name of Papenhayne, resident in Rangoon. Having inspected her I signed the contract for a year's hire. A week later we had obtained our crew, and the provisions and water having been brought on board, we started, shaping our course for Borneo.

"One might ask me, 'Why pass the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, those well-known haunts of the orchid?' and I would reply 'Overdone.' Robbed by innumerable collectors of the rarer specimens, these islands, small in area, are overdone. Simmonds well knew that, and, led by his sagacity, we discarded the obvious, steering, as I said, for Borneo.

"Reaching Sarawak we put in to Igan, which is situated on a bend of the Rejang river. Between here and Muka we made our hunting-ground, and here, led by Simmonds, I secured a rich harvest—half the contents of those packing-cases. Think of it, in that small tract of country disdained by collectors I secured all those, simply because I was led by a man of knowledge and genius."

"It's something like shopping, isn't it?" said Mrs. Kressler "Sometimes in side streets you find shops that are much better and cheaper than the big shops—if you know the ropes."

"Just so," said Kressler, pleased at this sudden flash of intelligence in his spouse. "Simmonds knew the ropes, as you put it, and having exhausted this piece of country we re-embarked and set sail for Sandal Wood Island in the Sunda group. It is quite a small island, but very rich in its flora and fauna and strangely neglected by collectors; and having secured a fairly good haul, we left for Mallicollo in the New Hebrides, stopping there only for water and leaving the next day for a small island to the south which Simmonds had marked down and where our luck still held good. We spent a fortnight there, and on the eve of our departure for Suva Simmonds made a proposition to me.

"It seems that somewhere about a year before a Dutchman named Van Horne had given information of the possibilities of Malaita in the Solomon Islands. Van Horne was a collector and he had marked down a special bay to the west of Malaita where the woods were extraordinarily rich. The only difficulty was the natives. The natives of Malaita are head hunters to a man; crafty, subtle and sly, they are the most dangerous people in the Eastern world. Civilisation has never really touched them. They are cannibals, but they kill really less for food than for the strange passion that has come down to them from immemorial times, the passion for securing and collecting heads. Head lust, one might call it.

"Well, Simmonds proposed to me that we should sail for Malaita, and, risking the natives, explore the woods spoken of by Van Horne. Such was his devotion to me, that, though he was only my paid agent who could have chosen safe places, he put every personal consideration aside—you quite appreciate that fact, don't you?"

"Yes—go on," said Mrs. Kressler, nestling close to him as if for protection against the head-hunters. "I quite see; they'd want to get his head, wouldn't they?—you said it was so big."

"I wasn't thinking of that—I meant risk of life. He was ready to risk his life for my sake and for the sake of the objects of our search. You see that clearly?"

"Yes, quite."

" Well, I accepted his suggestion, after due consideration, and next day we set sail for Malaita, favoured by fine weather, and in due course we arrived at the bay indicated by Van Horne. It was a narrow bay protected by a reef and backed by dense groves of cocoanuts, pandanus, bread-fruit and other tropical trees, but sign of natives there was none. Everything seemed in our favour, and then, all of a sudden, bad luck came, for on the morning after our arrival I was troubled by an attack of fever. I must have taken it at Mallicollo; however, that may be, it quite prostrated me, and, despite large doses of quinine, I was helpless and unable to land. Then it was that Simmonds showed himself again in his true colours. He determined to go ashore alone, taking with him two Kanakas we had picked up at Mallicollo. I pointed out to him the risk attending the landing of such a small party, but he was quite determined, and I was too weak to argue with him. So he went, taking provisions sufficient for three or four days, an automatic pistol, and the tin collecting box which he always carried slung across his shoulder by a strap.

" On the evening of the next day one of the Kanakas returned, hailing the ship from the beach. A boat put off for him and he came on board bearing a note from Simmonds. The note briefly stated that he had discovered what he called the wonder of the world, the golden stag he called it—a beetle absolutely unknown to science. He gave a short description, and finished by saying that he was pushing further into the woods and would return on the following day. You can fancy my feelings. The fever quite left me. I was myself again. My appetite came back, and that night I slept soundly, though dreaming indeed the most splendid dream in which I walked with my friend amongst groves where the flora was of almost impossible beauty. Next day I could scarcely rest watching the beach for his return, but evening came and passed and night fell without a sign of him. Next morning was the same; no sign. The day passed and night was falling when a hail from the beach reached us, but it was not Simmonds.

" It was Ramua, the second Kanaka, returned without his master. When we got him on board he was too exhausted to speak, then, after a while, when we had given him some food and brandy, he recovered enough to be able to tell his tale.

" He said that shortly after leaving us they had struck a part of the forest where ' Master with the big head '—that was the name he employed, speaking in the native—had expressed great joy over an insect which he had collected, and placed it in his tin box. He had sent the other Kanaka back with a note to me, and then he and Ramua had pushed on seeking more things, but finding little of importance, though indeed the forest was filled with plants and insects not inferior in looks to the one which had given his master such delight.

" Of course, I knew at once the truth, that Simmonds, as so often happens after a big find, had struck the commonplace again, and spurred by his first success had pushed on further and further. Ramua's narrative bore me out. Simmonds had indeed pushed on, making towards the north so as to avoid the hills, and that night, as they slept, he and Ramua had been seized by natives, bound and carried captive to a village situated in a clearing and close to the shore.

" Ramua on the way had managed to loosen his bonds, and, struggling free of them, had broken away and escaped. He could not tell what the natives had done to Simmonds, whether they had killed him or whether he still lived; he had made his way back to the ship by that beast instinct common to primitive man, and he declared, on being questioned, that he could find the village again if I cared to lead a relief expedition and take him as guide.

" Of course, I determined on that course of action at once. There were seven of us—myself, Masters the captain of the schooner, three sailors, one of which acted as bo'sun, and the two Kanakas. We had four repeating rifles and four revolvers on board and plenty of ammunition; these we collected, with enough provisions to last us four days, and, having given Ramua six hours in which to rest himself and sleep, we started just as day was breaking beyond the hills.

" We landed without opposition or difficulty, and leaving a man behind to take the boat back to the schooner and keep watch we struck inland, led by Ramua, through a forest where the cable lianas swung overhead and the tree-tops, moving in the land breeze that had just sprung up, showed the sky lit with morning.

" As the light grew stronger I could see

what a paradise for the collector this was likely to be, but, filled as my mind was with the fate of Simmonds, I was blind to the possibilities around me. I had but one idea—to push on.

" At noon we halted for a rest and some food, and two hours later we resumed the march, Ramua still leading with the unerring instinct of a dog, till we reached a part of the forest where only bread-fruit grew, interspersed with great patches of the mammee apple.

" Here Ramua called a halt and whispered that we were within earshot of the village.

" It was just sundown, and darkness was coming through the trees. He said that our best plan was to wait a few hours till the moon rose, then, the village being asleep, we could prospect the place, free Simmonds if he were still alive, perhaps without giving the alarm, or, if necessary, attack the place with better chance of success in the moonlight than we would have now that dusk was full upon us. We fell in with his plan, and, lying down, rested ourselves whilst darkness came on and the forest turned black with night.

" Presently a faint green light began to glow above us. It was the light of the rising moon. It grew stronger and, as it grew, the whisper came from Ramua that it was time for us to move. I ordered the men to look to their arms, see that their spare ammunition was all right, and walk softly ; then, following Ramua in single file, we moved off.

" It was easy going, and the ground, covered by a growth of low fern between the mammee apples and the breadfruit tracts, gave no sound to our footsteps. Ten minutes passed and then, Ramua halting, we spread out and peeping through the bushes saw the native village in its clearing, the moon full upon the grass-thatched huts, and, full in the moonlight in the open space around which the huts were grouped, a little fire burning and sending its smoke to the sky.

" Three sticks in the form of a tripod were placed over the fire and from them something hung on a string, twirling in the smoke. Beside the fire squatted an old man feeding the flickering flames with dried leaves and bits of tinder, the smoke rising in volumes at every handful, so that sometimes the thing that was being smoked was invisible. Not another soul was in sight ; the village slept well and soundly, and the reason of its sleep was evident in the embers of a great fire just dying out and the bones around it. The village was gorged.

" Ramua, who was beside me, plucked my sleeve, pointed out the old man by the fire and whispered : ' Devil-devil doctor ! ' Then he held up a finger and whispered : ' Wait ! '

" He rose, slipped away through the trees and presently returned with something in his hands ; it was a fathom of tough ground liana as thick as whipcord. Then, holding up his finger again, he glided away. Presently he re-appeared in the full moonlight, crossing the open space like a ghost, towards the old man, approaching him from behind.

" The devil-doctor heard and saw nothing. Then suddenly the liana was round his neck twisted tight, and he was lying on the ground kicking and, in a moment, dead. Not a cry had broken the stillness of the night to alarm the village, nothing but just the faint sound of the old man's brief struggle that might have been the sound of a bush pig in the undergrowth.

" Then Ramua removed the thing that was hanging from the tripod and picked up something that lay beside the body of the devil-doctor, something that shone in the moonlight. It was Simmonds' collecting box. The other thing, which he had removed from the tripod, was Simmonds' head.

" Coming back to us bearing these things, one in each hand, he whispered us to follow him, and striking through the trees we left the sleeping village behind us, reaching the beach as dawn was breaking, and setting sail an hour later.

" We buried the remains of my friend at sea ; and the golden stag for which he had risked his life—for which he gave his life—went to a London dust-bin, to a London dust-destructor. That is all I wanted to tell you—now you know."

Kressler paused. Mrs. Kressler said nothing. The cruel fatality of the whole business seemed to have stricken her dumb as she sat there, her head reclining against his shoulder. Kressler, half shocked with the effect of his revelation, looked down at her face . . . She was asleep.

Morning in Verse

DAWN

FLY hence, shadows, that do keep
Watchful sorrows charm'd in sleep!
Tho' the eyes be overtaken,
Yet the heart doth ever waken
Thoughts chain'd up in busy snares
Of continual woes and cares:
Love and griefs are so exprest
As they rather sigh than rest.
Fly hence, shadows, that do keep
Watchful sorrows charm'd in sleep!

JOHN FORD.

MORNING QUATRAINS

NOW through the morning doors behold
Phœbus array'd in burning gold,
Lashing his fiery Steeds, displays
His warm and all enlight'ning Rays.

Now each one to his work prepares,
All that have hands are labourers,
And Manufactures of each trade
By op'ning Shops are open laid.

Hob yokes his Oxen to the Team,
The Angler goes unto the stream,
The Woodman to the Purlews hies,
And lab'ring Bees to load their thighs.

Fair Amarillis drives her Flocks,
All night safe folded from the Fox,
To flow'ry Downs, where Collin stays,
To court her with his Roundelays.

CHARLES COTTON.

TO MORNING

O HOLY Virgin, clad in purest white,
Unlock heaven's golden gates, and issue forth;
Awake the dawn that sleeps in heaven; let light
Rise from the chambers of the east, and bring
The honeyed dew that cometh on waking day.
O radiant Morning, salute the Sun,
Roused like a huntsman to the chase, and with
Thy buskined feet appear upon our hills.

WILLIAM BLAKE.

DAYBREAK

STAY, O sweet, and do not rise!
The light that shines comes from thine eyes;
The day breaks not: it is my heart,
Because that you and I must part.
Stay! or else my joys will die
And perish in their infancy.

JOHN DONNE.

The Stroke of the Hour

Of justice dearly bought

By GILBERT PARKER

"THEY won't come to-night—sure." The girl looked again towards the west, where here and there, bare poles, or branches of trees, or slips of underbrush marked a road made across the plains through the snow. The sun was going down golden red, folding up the sky a wide soft curtain of pink and mauve and deep purple merging into the fathomless blue, where already the stars were beginning to quiver. The house stood on the edge of a little forest, which had boldly asserted itself in the wide flatness. At this point in the west the prairie merged into an undulating territory, where hill and wood rolled away from the banks of the Saskatchewan, making another England in beauty. The forest was a sort of advance post of that land of beauty.

Yet there was beauty, too, on this prairie, though there was nothing to the east but snow and the forest so far as eye could see. Nobility and peace and power brooded over the white world.

As the girl looked, it seemed as though the bosom of the land rose and fell. She had felt this vibrating life beat beneath the frozen surface. Now, as she gazed, she smiled sadly to herself, with drooping eyelids looking out from beneath strong brows.

"I know you—I know you," she said aloud. "You've got to take your toll. And when you're lying asleep like that, or pretending to, you reach up—and kill. And yet you can be kind—ah, but you can be kind and beautiful! But you must have your toll one way or t'other." She sighed and paused; then, after a moment, looking along the trail—"I don't expect they'll come to-night, and mebbe not to-morrow, if—if they stay for *that*."

Her eyes closed, she shivered a little. Her lips drew tight, and her face seemed suddenly to get thinner. "But dad wouldn't—no, he couldn't, not considerin'." Again she shut her eyes in pain.

Her face was now turned from the western road by which she had expected her travellers, and towards the east, where already the snow was taking on a faint bluish tint, a reflection of the sky deepening towards night in that half-circle of the horizon. Distant and a little bleak and cheerless the half-circle was looking now.

"No one—not for two weeks," she said, in comment on the eastern trail, which was so little frequented in winter, and this year had been less travelled than ever. "It would be nice to have a neighbour," she added, as she faced west and the sinking sun again. "I get so lonely—just minutes I get lonely. But it's them minutes that seem to count more than all the rest when they come. I expect that's it—we don't live in months and years, but just in minutes. It doesn't take long for an earthquake to do its work—it's seconds then . . . P'r'aps dad won't even come to-morrow," she added, as she laid her hand on the latch. "It never seemed so long before, not even when he's been away a week." She laughed bitterly. "Even bad company's better than no company at all. Sure. And Mickey has been here always when dad's been away past times. Mickey was a fool, but he was company; and mebbe he'd have been better company if he'd been more of a scamp and less of a fool. I dunno, but I really think he would. Bad company doesn't put you off so."

There was a scratching at the inside of the door. "My, if I didn't forget Shako," she said, "and he dying for a run!"

She opened the door quickly, and out jumped a Russian dog of almost full breed, with big, soft eyes like those of his mistress, and with the air of the north in every motion—like his mistress also.

"Come, Shako, a run—a run!"

An instant after she was flying off on a path towards the woods, her short skirts flying and showing limbs as graceful and

shapely as those of any woman of that world of social grace which she had never seen; for she was a prairie girl through and through, born on the plains and fed on its scanty fare—scanty as to variety, at least. Backwards and forwards they ran, the girl shouting like a child of ten—she was twenty-three—her eyes flashing, her fine white teeth showing, her hands thrown up in sheer excess of animal life, her hair blowing about her face—brown, strong hair, wavy and plentiful.

Fine creature as she was, her finest features were her eyes and her hands. The eyes might have been found in the most savage places; the hands, however, only could have come through breeding. She had got them honestly; for her mother was descended from an old family of the French province. That was why she had the name of Loisette—and had a touch of distinction. It was the strain of the patrician in the full blood of the peasant; but it gave her something which made her what she was—what she had been since a child, noticeable and besought, sometimes beloved. It was too strong a nature to compel love often, but it never failed to compel admiration. Not greatly a creature of words, she had become moody of late; and even now, alive with light and feeling and animal life, she suddenly stopped her romp and run, and called the dog to her.

"Heel, Shako!" she said, and made for the door of the little house, which looked so snug and home-like. She paused before she came to the door, to watch the smoke curling up from the chimney straight as a column, for there was not a breath of air stirring. The sun was almost gone and the strong bluish light was settling on everything, giving even the green spruce trees a curious burnished tone.

Swish! Thud! She faced the woods quickly. It was only a sound that she had heard how many hundred times! It was the snow slipping from some broad branch of the fir trees to the ground. Yet she started now. Something on her mind, agitating her senses, affecting her self-control.

"I'll be jumping out of my boots when the fire snaps, or the frost cracks the ice, next," she said aloud contemptuously. "I dunno what's the matter with me. I feel as if someone was hiding somewhere, ready to pop out on me. I haven't never felt like that before."

She had formed the habit of talking to herself, for it had seemed at first, as she was left alone when her father went trapping or upon journeys for the Government, that by and by she would start at the sound of her own voice, if she didn't think aloud. So she was given to soliloquy, defying the old belief that people who talked to themselves were going mad. She laughed at that. She said that birds sang to themselves and didn't go mad, and crickets chirruped, and frogs croaked, and owls hooted, and she would talk and not go crazy either. So she talked to herself and to Shako.

¶

HOW quiet it was inside when her light supper was eaten, bread and beans and pea soup—she had got this from her French mother. Now she sat, her elbows on her knees, her chin on her hands, looking into the fire. Shako was at her feet upon the great musk ox rug, which her father had got on one of his hunting trips in the Athabasca country years ago. It belonged as she belonged. It breathed of the life of the northland, for the timbers of the hut were hewn cedar; the rough chimney, the seats, and the shelves on which a few books made a fair show beside the bright tins and the scanty crockery, were of pine; and the horned heads of deer and wapiti made pegs for coats and caps, and rests for guns and rifles. It was a place of comfort; it had an air of well-to-do thrift, even as the girl's dress, though plain, was made of good stuff, grey, with a touch of dark red to match the auburn of her hair.

A book lay open in her lap, but she had scarcely tried to read it. She had put it down after a few moments. It had sent her thoughts off into a world where her life had played a part too big for books, too deep for the plummet of any save those who had lived through the storm of life's trials; and life when it is bitter to the young is bitter with an agony the old never know. At last she spoke to herself.

"She knows now! Now she knows what it is, how it feels—your heart like red-hot coals, and something in your heart that's like a turnscrew, and you want to die and can't, for you've got to live and suffer!"

Again she was quiet, and only the dog's heavy breathing, the snap of the fire, or the crack of a timber in the deadly frost broke the silence. Inside it was warm and bright and home-like; outside it was twenty degrees below zero, and like some vast tomb

where life itself was congealed, and only the white stars, low, twinkling, and quizzical, lived—a life of sharp corrosion, not of fire.

Suddenly she raised her head and listened. The dog did the same. None but those whose lives are lived in lonely places can be so acute, so sensitive to sound. It was a feeling delicate and intense, the whole nature getting the vibration. You could have heard nothing, had you been there; none but one who was of the wide spaces could have done so. But the dog and the woman felt and both strained towards the window. Again they heard and started to their feet. It was far, far away, and still you could not have heard; but now they heard clearly—a cry in the night, a cry of pain and despair. The girl ran to the window and pulled aside the bearskin curtain which had completely shut out the light. Then she stirred the fire, threw a log upon it, snuffed the candles, hastily put on her moccasins, fur coat, wool cap, and gloves, and went to the door quickly, the dog at her heels. Opening it, she stepped out into the night.

"*Qui va là?* Who is it? Where?" she called, and strained towards the west. She thought it might be her father or Mickey, the hired man, or both.

The answer came from the east, out of the homeless, neighbourless, empty east—a cry, louder now. There were only stars, and the night was dark, though not deep dark. She sped along the prairie road as fast as she could, once or twice stopping to call aloud. In answer to her calls the voice sounded nearer and nearer. Now suddenly she left the trail and bore away northward. At last the voice was very near. Presently a figure appeared ahead, staggering towards her.

"*Qui va là?* Who is it?" she asked.

"Ba'tiste Caron," was the reply in English, in a faint voice. She was beside him in an instant.

"What has happened? Why are you off the trail?" she said, and supported him.

"My Injun stoled my dogs and run off," he replied. "I run after. Then, when I am to come to the trail"—he paused to find the English word, and could not—"*encore* to this trail I no can. So. Ah, *bon Dieu*, it has so awful!" He swayed and would have fallen, but she caught him, bore him up. She was strong, and he was slight as a girl, though tall.

"When was that?" she asked.

"Two nights ago," he answered, and swayed.

"Wait," she said, and pulled a flask from her pocket. "Drink this—quick!"

He raised it to his lips, but her hand was still on it, and she only let him take a little. Then she drew it away, though she had almost to use force, he was so eager for it. Now she took a biscuit from her pocket.

"Eat; then some more brandy after," she urged. "Come on; it's not far. See, there's the light," she added cheerily, raising her head towards the hut.

"I saw it just when I have fall down—it safe me. I sit down to die—like that! But it safe me, that light—so. Ah, *bon Dieu*, it was so far, and I want eat so!"

Already he had swallowed the biscuit.

"When did you eat last?" she asked, as she urged him on.

"Two night—except for one leetla piece of bread—I fin' it in my pocket. *Grâce!* I have travel so far. *Jésu*, I think it ees ten thousan' miles, I go. But I mus' go on, I mus' go—*certainement*."

The light came nearer and nearer. His footsteps quickened, though he staggered now and then, and went like a horse that has run its race, but is driven upon its course again, going heavily with mouth open and head thrown forward and down.

"But I mus' to get there, an' you—you will to help me, eh?"

Again he swayed, but her strong arm held him up. As they ran on, in a kind of dog trot, her firm hand upon his arm—he seemed not to notice it—she became conscious, though it was half dark, of what sort of man she had saved. He was about her own age, perhaps a year or two older, with little, if any, hair upon his face, save a slight moustache. His eyes, deep sunken as they were, she made out were black, and the face, though drawn and famished, had a handsome look. Presently she gave him another sip of brandy, and he quickened his steps, speaking to himself the while.

"I haf to do it—if I lif. It is to go, go, go, till I get."

Now they came to the hut where the firelight flickered on the window pane; the door was flung open, and, as he stumbled on the threshold, she helped him into the warm room. She almost pushed him over to the fire.

Divested of his outer coat, muffler, cap, and leggings, he sat on a bench before the fire, his eyes wandering from the girl to

the flames, and his hands clasping and unclasping between his knees. His eyes dilating with hunger, he watched her preparations for his supper; and when at last—and she had been but a moment—it was placed before him, his head swam, and he turned faint with the stress of his longing. He would have swallowed a basin of pea soup at a draught, but she stopped him, holding the basin till she thought he might venture again. Then came cold beans, and some meat which she toasted at the fire and laid upon his plate. They had not spoken since first entering the house, when tears had shone in his eyes, and he had said:

"You have safe—ah, you have safe me, and so I will do it yet by help *bon Dieu*—yes."

The meat was done at last, and he sat with a great dish of tea beside him, his pipe alight.

"What time, if please?" he asked. "I t'ink nine hour, but no sure."

"It is near nine," she said. She hastily tidied up the table after his meal, and then came and sat in her chair over against the wall of the rude fireplace.

"Nine—dat is good. The moon rise at 'leven; den I go. I go on," he said, "if you show me de queeck way."

"You go on—how can you go on?" she asked, almost sharply.

"Will you not to show me?" he asked.

"Show you what?" she asked abruptly.

"The queeck way to Askatoon," he said, as though surprised that she should ask. "They say me if I get here you will tell me queeck way to Askatoon. Time, he go so fas', an' I have a loose day an' a night, an' I mus' get Askatoon if I lif—I mus' get dere in time. It is all safe to de stroke of de hour, *mais*, after, it is—*bon Dieu!*—it is hell then. Who shall forgif me—no!"

"The stroke of the hour—the stroke of the hour!" It beat into her brain. Were they both thinking of the same thing now?

"You will show me queeck way. I mus' be Askatoon in two days, or it is all over," he almost moaned. "Is no man here—I forget dat name, my head go round like a wheel; but I know dis place, an' de good God He help me fin' my way to where I call out, *bien sûr*. Dat man's name I have forget."

"My father's name is John Alroyd," she answered absently, for there were hammering at her brain the words, "*The stroke of the hour.*"

"Ah, now I get—yes. An' your name, it is 'Loisette Alroy'—ah, I have it in my mind now—Loisette. I not forget dat name, I not forget you—no."

"Why do you want to go the 'quick' way to Askatoon?" she asked.

He puffed a moment at his pipe before he answered her. Presently he said, holding out his pipe, "You not like smoke, mebbe?"

She shook her head in negation, making an impatient gesture.

"I forget ask you," he said. "Dat journee make me forget. When Injun Jo he leave me with the dogs, an' I wake up all alone, an' not know my way—not like Jo, I think I die, it is so bad, so *terrible* in my head. Not'ing but snow, not'ing. But dere is de sun; it shine. It say to me, 'Wake up, Ba'tiste; it will be all right bime-by.' But all time I t'ink I go mad, for I mus' get Askatoon before—*dat.*"

She started. Had she not used the same word in thinking of Askatoon. "*That,*" she had said.

"Why do you want to go the 'quick' way to Askatoon?" she asked again, her face pale, her foot beating the floor impatiently.

"To save him before *dat!*" he answered, as though she knew of what he was speaking and thinking.

"What is *that?*" she asked. She knew now, surely, but she must ask it nevertheless.

"Dat hanging—of Haman," he answered. He nodded to himself. Then he took to gazing into the fire. His lips moved as though talking to himself, and the hand that held the pipe lay forgotten on his knee.

"What have you to do with Haman?" she asked slowly, her eyes burning.

"I want safe him—I mus' give him free." He tapped his breast. "It is here to mak' him free." He still tapped his breast.

For a moment she stood frozen still, her face thin and drawn and white; then suddenly the blood rushed back into her face, and a red storm raged in her eyes.

She thought of the sister, younger than herself, whom Rube Haman had married and driven to her grave within a year—the sweet Lucy, with the name of her father's mother. Lucy had been all English in her face and her tongue, a flower of the west, driven to darkness by this horse-dealer brute, who, before he was arrested and tried for murder, was about to marry Kate Wimper. Kate Wimper had stolen him from Lucy before Lucy's first and only child was born, the child that could not

survive the warm mother-life withdrawn, and so had gone down the valley whither the broken-hearted mother had fled. It was Kate Wimper, who, before that, had waylaid the one man for whom she herself had ever cared, and drawn him from her side by such attractions as she herself would keep for an honest wife, if such she ever chanced to be. An honest wife she would have been had Kate Wimper not crossed the straight path of her life. The man she had loved was gone to his end also, reckless and hopeless, after he had thrown away his chance of a lifetime with Loisette Alroyd. There had been left behind this girl, to whom tragedy had come too young, who drank humiliation with a heart as proud as ever straightly set its course through crooked ways.

It had hurt her, twisted her nature a little, given a fountain of bitterness to her soul, which welled up and flooded her life sometimes. It had given her face no sourness, but it put a shadow into her eyes.

She had been glad when Haman was condemned for murder, for she believed he had committed it, and ten times hanging could not compensate for that dear life gone straight from their sight—Lucy, the pride of her father's heart. She was glad when Haman was condemned, because of the woman who had stolen him from Lucy, because of that other man, her lover gone out of her own life. The new hardness in her rejoiced that now the woman, if she had any heart at all, must have it bowed down by this supreme humiliation and wrung by the ugly tragedy of the hempen rope.

And now this man before her, this man with a boy's face, with the dark, luminous eyes, whom she had saved from the frozen plains, he had that in his breast which would free Haman, so he had said. A fury had its birth in her at that moment. Something seemed to seize her brain and master it, something so big that it held all her faculties in perfect control, and she felt herself in an atmosphere where all life moved round her mechanically, she herself the only sentient thing, so much greater than all she saw, or all that she realised by her subconscious self. Everything in the world seemed small. How calm it was even with the fury within!

"Tell me," she said quietly, "tell me how you are able to save Haman?"

"He not kill Wakely. It is my brudder, Fadette, dat kill and get away. Haman he is drunk, end everyt'ing seem to say Haman he did it, an' everyone know Haman is not friend to Wakely. So the juree say he must be hanging. But my brudder he go to die with hawful bad cold queeck, an' he send for the priest an' for me, an' tell all. I go to Governor with the priest, an' Governor gif me dat writing here." He tapped his breast, then took out a wallet and showed the paper to her. "It is life of dat Haman, *voici!* And so I safe him for my brudder. Dat was a bad boy, Fadette. He was bad all time since he was a baby, an' I t'ink him pretty lucky to die on his bed, an' get absolve and go to purgatore. If he not have luck like dat he go to hell, an' stay there."

He sighed, and put the wallet back in his breast carefully, his eyes half-shut with weariness, his handsome face drawn and thin, his limbs lax with fatigue.

"If I get Askatoon before de time for *dat*, I be happy in my heart, for dat brudder off mine he get out of purgatore bime-bye, I t'ink."

His eyes were almost shut, but he drew himself together with a great effort, and added desperately, "No sleep. If I sleep it is all smash. Man say me I can get Askatoon by dat time from here. If I go queeck way across lak'—it is all froze now, dat lak'—an' down dat Foxtail Hills. Is it so, ma'm'selle?"

"By the 'quick' way if you can make it in time," she said; "but it is no way for the stranger to go. There are always bad spots on the ice—it is not safe. You could not find your way."

"I mus' get dere in time," he said desperately.

"You can't do it—alone," she said. "Do you want to risk all and lose?"

He frowned in self-suppression. "Long way, I no can get dere in time?" he asked.

She thought a moment. "No; it can't be done by the long way. But there is another way—a third trail, the trail the Gover'ment men made a year ago when they came to survey. It is a good trail. It is blazed in the woods and staked on the plains. You cannot miss. But—but there is so little time." She looked at the clock on the wall. "You cannot leave here much before sunrise, and——"

"I will leef when de moon rise, at eleven," he interjected.

"You have had no sleep for two nights, and no food. You can't last it out," she said calmly.

The deliberate look on his face deepened to stubbornness.

" It is my vow to my brudder—he is in purgatore. An' I mus' do it," he rejoined, with an emphasis there was no mistaking. " You can show me dat way ? "

She went to a drawer and took out a piece of paper. Then, with a point of blackened stick, as he watched her and listened, she swiftly drew his route for him.

" Yes, I get it in my head," he said. " I go dat way, but I wish—I wish it was dat queeck way. I have no fear, not'ing. I go w'en dat moon rise—I go, *bien sûr*."

" You must sleep, then, while I get some food for you." She pointed to a couch in a corner. " I will wake you when the moon rises."

For the first time he seemed to realise her, for a moment to leave the thing which consumed him, and put his mind upon her.

" You not happy—you not like me here ? " he asked simply ; then added quickly, " I am not a bad man like me brudder—no."

Her eyes rested on him for a moment as though realising him, while some thought was working in her mind behind.

" No, you are not a bad man," she said. " Men and women are equal on the plains. You have no fear—I have no fear."

He glanced at the rifles on the wall, then back at her. " My mudder, she was good woman. I am glad she did not lif to know what Fadette do." His eyes drank her in for a minute, then he said : " I go sleep now, t'ank you—till moontime."

In a moment his deep breathing filled the room, the only sound save for the fire within and the frost outside.

Time went on. The night deepened.

¶

LOISETTE sat beside the fire, but her body was half-turned from it towards the man on the sofa. She was not agitated outwardly, but within there was that fire which burns up life and hope and all the things that come between us and great issues. It had burned up everything in her except one thought, one powerful motive. She had been deeply wronged, and justice had been about to give " an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." But the man lying there had come to sweep away the scaffolding of justice—he had come for that.

Perhaps he might arrive at Askatoon before the stroke of the hour, but still he would be too late, for in her pocket now was the Governor's reprieve. The man had slept soundly. His wallet was still in his breast ; but the reprieve was with her.

If he left without discovering his loss, and got well on his way, and discovered it then, it would be too late. If he returned—she only saw one step before her, she would wait for that, and deal with it when it came. She was thinking of Lucy, of her own lover ruined and gone. She was calm in her madness.

At the first light of the moon she roused him. She had put food into his fur coat pocket, and after he had drunk a bowl of hot pea soup, while she told him his course again, she opened the door, and he passed out into the night. He started forward without a word, but came back again and caught her hand.

"*Pardon*," he said ; " I go forget every-t'ing except *dat*. But I t'ink what you do for me, it is better than all my life. *Bien sûr*, I will come again, when I get my mind to myself. Ah, but you are beautibul," he said, " an' you not happy. Well, I come again—yes, *à Dieu*."

He was gone into the night, with the moon silvering the sky, and the steely frost eating into the sentient life of this northern world. Inside the house, with the bearskin blind dropped at the window again, and the fire blazing high, Loisette sat with the Governor's reprieve in her hand. Looking at it, she wondered why it had been given to Ba'tiste Caron, and not to a police officer. Ah, yes, it was plain—Ba'tiste was a woodsman and plainsman, and could go far more safely than a constable, and faster. Ba'tiste had reason for going fast, and he would travel night and day—he was travelling night and day indeed. And now Ba'tiste might get there, but the reprieve would not. He would not be able to stop the hanging of Haman—the hanging of Rube Haman.

A change came over her. Her eyes blazed, her breast heaved now. She had been so quiet, so cold and still. But life seemed moving in her once again. The woman, Kate Wimper, who had helped to send two people to their graves, would now drink the dregs of shame, if she was capable of shame—would be robbed of her happiness, if so be she loved Rube Haman.

She stood up, as though to put the paper in the fire, but paused suddenly at one thought—*Rube Haman was innocent of murder*.

Even so, he was not innocent of Lucy's misery and death, of the death of the little

one who only opened its eyes to the light for an instant, and then went into the dark again. But truly she was justified! When Haman was gone, things would go on just the same—and she had been so bitter, her heart had been pierced as with a knife these past three years. Again she held out her hand to the fire, but suddenly she gave a little cry and put her hand to her head. There was Ba'tiste!

What was Ba'tiste to her? Nothing—nothing at all. She had saved his life—even if she wronged Ba'tiste, her debt would be paid. No, she would not think of Ba'tiste. Yet she did not put the paper in the fire, but in the pocket of her dress. Then she went to her room, leaving the door open. The bed was opposite the fire, and, as she lay there—she did not take off her clothes, she knew not why—she could see the flames. She closed her eyes, but could not sleep, and more than once when she opened them she thought she saw Ba'tiste sitting there as he had sat hours before. Why did Ba'tiste haunt her so? What was it he had said in his broken English as he went away?—that he would come back; that she was "beautibul."

All at once as she lay still, her head throbbing, her feet and hands icy cold, she sat up listening.

"Ah—again!" she cried. She sprang from her bed, rushed to the door, and strained her eyes into the silver night. She called into the icy void, "*Qui va là?* Who goes?"

She leaned forward, her hand at her ear, but no sound came in reply. Once more she called, but nothing answered. The night was all light and frost and silence.

She had only heard, in her own brain, the iteration of Ba'tiste's calling. Would he reach Askatoon in time, she wondered, as she shut the door? Why had she not gone with him and attempted the shorter way—the quick way, he had called it? All at once the truth came back upon her, stirring her now. It would do no good for Ba'tiste to arrive in time. He might plead to them all and tell the truth about the reprieve, but it would not avail—Rube Haman would hang. That did not matter—even though he was innocent; but Ba'tiste's brother would be so long in purgatory. And even that would not matter; but she would hurt Ba'tiste—Ba'tiste—Ba'tiste. And Ba'tiste, he would know that she—and he had called her "beautibul," that she had——

With a cry she suddenly clothed herself for travel. She put some food and drink in a leather bag and slung them over her shoulder. Then she dropped on a knee and wrote a note to her father, tears falling from her eyes. She heaped wood on the fire and moved towards the door. All at once she turned to the crucifix on the wall which had belonged to her mother, and, though she had followed her father's Protestant religion, she kissed the feet of the sacred figure.

"Oh, Christ, have mercy on me, and bring me safe to my journey's end—in time," she said breathlessly; then she went softly to the door, leaving the dog behind.

It opened, closed, and the night swallowed her. Like a ghost she sped the quick way to Askatoon. She was six hours behind Ba'tiste, and, going hard all the time, it was doubtful if she could get there before the fatal hour.

On the trail Ba'tiste had taken, there were two huts where he could rest, and he had carried his blanket slung on his shoulder. The way she went gave no shelter save the trees and caves which had been used to *câche* buffalo meat and hides in old days. But beyond this there was danger in travelling by night, for the springs beneath the ice of the three lakes she must cross made it weak and rotten even in the fiercest weather, and what would no doubt have been death to Ba'tiste, would be peril at least to her. Why had she not gone with him?

"He had in his face what was in Lucy's," she said to herself, as she sped on. "She was fine like him, ready to break her heart for those she cared for. My, if she had seen him first instead of——"

She stopped short, for the ice gave way to her foot, and she only sprang back in time to save herself. But she trotted on, mile after mile, the dog-trot of the Indian, head bent forward, toeing in, breathing steadily, but sharply.

The morning came, noon, then a fall of snow and a keen wind, and despair in her heart; but she had passed the danger spots, and now, if the storm did not overwhelm her, she might get to Askatoon in time. In the midst of the storm she came to one of the caves of which she had known. Here was wood for a fire, and here she ate, and in weariness unspeakable, fell asleep. When she waked it was near sundown, the storm had ceased, and, as on the night before, the sky was stained with colour and drowned in splendour.

" I will do it—I will do it, Ba'tiste ! " she called, and laughed aloud into the sunset. She had battled with herself all the way, and she had conquered. Right was right, and Rube Haman must not be hung for what he did not do. Her heart hardened whenever she thought of Ba'tiste, who had to suffer for the deed of a brother in " purgatore." Once again the night and its silence and loneliness followed her, the only living thing near the trail till long after midnight. After that, as she knew, there were houses here and there where she might have rested, but she pushed on unceasing.

At daybreak she fell in with a settler going to Askatoon with his dogs. Seeing how exhausted she was, he made her ride a few miles upon his sledge ; then she sped on ahead again till she came to the borders of Askatoon.

People were already in the streets, and all were tending one way. She stopped and asked the time. It was within a quarter of an hour of the time when Haman was to pay another's penalty. She spurred herself on, and came to the jail blind with fatigue. As she neared the jail she saw her father and Mickey. In amazement her father hailed her, but she would not stop. She was admitted to the prison on explaining that she had a reprieve. Entering a room filled with excited people, she heard a cry.

It came from Ba'tiste. He had arrived but ten minutes before, and, in the sheriff's presence, had discovered his loss. He had appealed in vain.

But, now, as he saw the girl, he gave a shout of joy which pierced the hearts of all.

"Ah, you haf it ! Say you haf it, or it is no use—he mus' hang. Spik—spik ! Ah, my brudder—it is to do him right ! Ah, Loisette—*bon Dieu, merci !* "

For answer she placed the reprieve in the hands of the sheriff. Then she swayed and fell fainting at the feet of Ba'tiste.

She had come at the stroke of the hour.

When she left for her home again the sheriff kissed her.

And that was not the only time he kissed her. He did it again six months later, at the beginning of the harvest, when she and Ba'tiste Caron started off on the long trail of life together. None but Ba'tiste knew the truth about the loss of the reprieve, and to him she was " beautibul " just the same, and greatly to be desired.

Things I Have Known

I HAVE known roses red as red,
And lips as red as roses are,
And the pale glory of the dead,
And the bright wonder of a star.

I have known laughter and the gold
Sunlight laughing on a green sea,
And fishermen, wrinkled and old,
Clinging to youth's philosophy.

I have known love and joyous things
Like lovely words to patterns made,
And the quietness which evening brings,
And the coolness of a deep shade.

I have known wine of vintage rare,
And vineyards where the wine is wrung,
Lands where the sky is blue and clear,
And where old southern songs are sung.

I have known all these things and more—
The forest's melancholy cries,
And the orchard's ripening store,
And tenderness in a child's eyes.

CLARENCE WINCHESTER

Jimmy Goggles The God

A little salvage job and its extraordinary sequel

By H. G. WELLS

"IT isn't everyone who's been a god," said the sunburnt man. "But it's happened to me, among other things."

I intimated my sense of his condescension.

"It don't leave much for ambition, does it?" said the sunburnt man. "I was one of those men who were saved from the *Ocean Pioneer*. Gummy! How time flies! It's twenty years ago. I doubt if you'll remember anything of the *Ocean Pioneer*?"

The name was familiar, and I tried to recall when and where I had read it. The *Ocean Pioneer?* "Something about gold dust," I said vaguely, "but the precise——"

"That's it," he said. "In a beastly little channel she hadn't no business in—dodging pirates. It was before they'd put the kybosh on that business. And there'd been volcanoes or something, and all the rocks was wrong. There's places about by Soona where you fair have to follow the rocks about to see where they're going next. Down she went in twenty fathoms before you could have dealt for whist, with fifty thousand pounds worth of gold aboard, it was said, in one form or another——"

"Survivors?"

"Three."

"I remember the case now," I said. "There was something about salvage——"

But at the word salvage the sunburnt man exploded into language so extraordinarily horrible that I stopped aghast. He came down to more ordinary swearing and pulled himself up abruptly.

"Excuse me," he said, "but salvage!" He leant over towards me. "I was in that job," he said. "Tried to make myself a rich man and got made a god instead. I've got my feelings."

"It ain't all jam being a god," said the sunburnt man, and for some time conversed by means of such pithy but unprogressive axioms. At last he took up his tale again.

"There was me," said the sunburnt man, "and a seaman named Jacobs, and Always, the mate of the *Ocean Pioneer*. And him it was that set the whole thing going. I remember him now, when he was in the jolly boat, suggesting it all to our minds just by one sentence. He was a wonderful hand at suggesting things. 'There was forty thousand pounds,' he said, 'on that ship, and it's for me to say just where she went down.'

"It didn't need much brains to tumble to that. And he was the leader from the first to the last. He got hold of the Sanderses and their brig—they were brothers, and the brig was the *Pride of Banya;* and he it was bought the diving dress—a second-hand one with a compressed air apparatus instead of tubes and pumping. He'd have done the diving, too, if it hadn't made him sick—as it does many people—going down. And the salvage people were mucking about with a chart he'd cooked up, as solemn as could be, at Starr Race, a hundred and twenty miles away.

"I can tell you we was a happy lot aboard that brig, jokes and drink and bright hopes all the time. It all seemed so neat and clean and straightforward, and what rough chaps call a 'cert.' And we used to speculate how the other lot, the proper salvagers, who started two days before us, were getting on, until our sides fairly ached. We all messed together in the Sanderses' cabin—it was a curious crew, all officers and no men, and there stood the diving dress waiting its turn. The younger Sanders was a humorous sort of chap, and he saw something funny in the confounded thing's great fat head and its stare, and he made us see it too. 'Jimmy Goggles,' he used to call it, and talk to it like a Christian—ask if he was married, and how Mrs. Goggles was and all the little Goggleses. Fit to make you split. And every blessed day all of us used to drink the health of Jimmy Goggles in rum, and unscrew his eye and pour a glass of rum in him, until instead of that nasty macintosheriness he seemed as nice in the inside as a cask of rum. It was jolly times

we had those days, I can tell you—little suspecting all the disappointment that was a-coming.

" We weren't going to throw away our chances by any blessed hurry, you know, and we spent a whole day sounding our way towards where the *Ocean Pioneer* had gone down, right between two chunks of ropey grey rock-lava rocks that rose nearly out of the water. We had to lay off about half a mile to get a safe anchorage ; and there was a row who should stop aboard I remember ; and there she lay just as she had gone down, so that you could see the top of the masts; that were still standing, quite distinctly. And I went down on Friday morning, directly it was light.

" What a surprise it was ! I can see it all now quite distinctly. It was a queer looking place, and the light was just coming. People over here think every blessed place in the tropics is a flat shore and palm trees and surf, bless 'em. This place, for instance, wasn't a bit that way. Not common rocks were they, undermined by waves; but great curved banks like ironwork cinder heaps, with green slime below and thorny shrubs and things just waving upon them here and there, and the water glassy, calm, and clear, and showing you a kind of dirty grey-black shine, with huge flaring red-brown weeds spreading motionless, and crawling and darting things going through it. And far beyond the ditches and pools, and the heaps, was a forest on the mountain flank, growing again after the fires and cinder showers of the last eruption. And the other way, forest, too, and a kind of broken—what was it ?—amphitheatre of black and rusty cinders, rising out of it, and the sea in a kind of bay in the middle.

" The dawn, I say, was just coming, and there wasn't much colour about things, and not a human being but ourselves anywhere in sight up or down the channel. Except the *Pride of Banya* lying out beyond a lump of rocks towards the line of sea.

" Not a human being in sight," he repeated, and paused. " I don't know where they came from, not a bit. And we were feeling so safe, that we were all alone, that young Sanders was a-singing. I was in Jimmy Goggles, all except the helmet. ' Easy,' says Always, ' there's her mast.' And after I'd had just one squint over the gunwale, I caught up the bogey and almost tipped out as old Sanders brought the boat round. When the windows were screwed and everything was all right, I shut the valve from the compressed air belt in order to help my sinking, jumped overboard feet foremost, and down I went—for we hadn't a ladder. I left the boat pitching, and all of them no doubt staring down into the water after me, with all their eyes, as my head sank down into the weeds and blackness that lay about the mast. I suppose nobody would have bothered about a look out at such a desolate place.

" Of course you must understand that I was a greenhorn at diving. None of us were divers. We'd had to muck about with the thing to get the way of it, and this was the first time I'd been at all deep. It feels damnable. Your ears hurt beastly. I don't know if you've ever hurt yourself yawning, or sneezing, but it takes you like that, only ten times worse. And a pain over the eyebrows here—splitting. And a feeling like influenza in the head. And it isn't all heaven in your lungs and things. Going down feels like the beginning of a lift, only it keeps on. And you can't turn your head up to see what's above you, and you can't get a fair squint at what's happening to your feet, without bending down something painful. And being deep, it was dark, let alone the blackness of the ashes and mud that formed the bottom. It was like going down out of the dawn back into the night that had just passed.

" The mast came up like a ghost out of the black, and then a lot of fishes, and then a lot of flapping red seaweed, and then I came with a kind of dull bang on the deck of the *Ocean Pioneer*, and the fishes that had been feeding on the dead rose about me, like a swarm of flies from road stuff in summer time. I turned on the compressed air again —for the suit was a bit thick and mackintoshy after all, in spite of the rum—and stood recovering myself. It struck coolish down there, and that helped take off the stuffiness a bit.

" When I began to feel easier, I started looking about me. It was an extraordinary sight. Even the light was extraordinary—a kind of reddy-coloured twilight, on account of the streamers of seaweed that floated up on either side of the ship. And far overhead just a moony deep green blue. The deck of the ship, except for a slight list to starboard, was level, and lay all dark and long between the weeds, clear except where the masts had snapped when she

rolled, and vanishing into night towards the forecastle. There wasn't any dead on the decks, most were in the weeds alongside, I suppose; but afterwards I found two skeletons lying in the passengers' cabins, where death had come to them.

"It was curious to stand on that deck and recognise it all, bit by bit; a place against the rail where I'd been fond of smoking by starlight, and the corner where an old chap from Sydney used to flirt with a widow we had aboard. A comfortable couple they'd been, only a month ago, and now you couldn't have got a meal for a kitten off either of them.

"I've always had a bit of a philosophical turn, and I dare say I spent the best part of five minutes in such thoughts before I went below to find where the blessed dust was stored. It was slow work hunting—feeling it was for the most part, pitchy dark, with confusing blue gleams down the companion. And there were things moving about; a dab at my glass once, and once a pinch at my leg. Crabs! I kicked a lot of loose stuff that puzzled me, and stooped and picked up something all knobs and spikes. What do you think? —backbone! But I never had any particular feeling for bones. We had talked the affair over pretty thoroughly, and always knew just where the stuff was stowed. I found it that trip. I lifted a box on end."

He broke off in his story. "I've lifted it," he said. "As near as that! Forty thousand pounds worth of pure unsullied gold! I shouted inside my helmet as a kind of cheer, and hurt my ears. I was getting confoundedly stuffy and tired by this time —I must have been down twenty-five minutes or more—and I thought this was good enough.

"I went up the companion again, and as my eyes came up flush with the deck a thundering great crab gave a kind of hysterical jump and went scuttling off sideways. Quite a start it gave me. I stood up clear on deck and shut the valve behind the helmet to let the air accumulate in the suit and carry me up again. That's how it's done, you know. I noticed a kind of whacking from above, as though they were hitting the water with an oar, but I didn't look up. I fancied they were signalling me to come up.

"And then something showed down by me, something heavy, and stood a-quiver in the planks. I looked, and there was a long knife I'd seen young Sanders handling. Thinks I, he's dropped it, and I was still calling him this kind of fool and that, for it might have hurt me serious, when I began to lift and drive up towards the daylight.

"Just about the level of the top spars of the *Ocean Pioneer*, whack! I came against something sinking down, and a boot knocked in front of my helmet. Then something else —struggling frightful. It was a big weight atop of me, whatever it was, and moving and twisting about. I'd have thought it a great big octopus or some such thing if it hadn't been for the boot. But octopuses don't wear boots. It was all in a moment, of course. I felt myself sinking down again, and I threw my arms about to keep steady, and the whole lot rolled free of me and shot down as I went up——"

He paused.

"I saw young Sanders' face, over a naked black shoulder, and a spear driven clean through his neck, and out of his mouth and neck what looked like spurts of pink smoke in the water. And down they went, clutching one another, turning over, and both too far gone to leave go, and in another

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second my helmet came a whack, fit to split, against the niggers' canoes. It was niggers ! two boats full !

" It was lively times, I tell you ! Overboard came Always with three spears in him. There was the legs of three or four black chaps kicking about me in the water. I couldn't see much, but I saw the game was up at a glance, gave my valve a twist, and went bubbling down again after poor Always, in as awful a state of scare and astonishment as you can well imagine. I passed young Sanders and the nigger going up again, and in another moment I was standing in the dim again on the deck of the *Ocean Pioneer*.

" Gummy, thinks I, here's a fix ! Niggers ! At first I couldn't see anything for it but stifle below or stabs above. I didn't properly understand how much air there was to last me out, but I didn't feel like standing very much more of it down below. I was hot and frightfully heady, quite apart from the blue funk I was in. We'd never reckoned with these beastly natives, who as you know are pretty well like the Papuan devils. No doubt they'd been stalking the brig at the very time we'd been setting about diving.

" It wasn't any good coming up where I was, but I had to do something. On the spur of the moment, I jumped over the side of the brig and landed among the weeds, and set off through the darkness, as fast as I could. I just stopped once and knelt and twisted back my head in the helmet and had a look up. It was a most extraordinary bright green-blue above, and the two canoes and the boat were floating there very small and distant like a kind of twisted H. And it made me feel sick to squint up at it, and think what the pitching and swaying of the three meant.

" It was just about the most horrible ten minutes I ever had, blundering about in that darkness—pressure something awful, pain across the chest, sick with funk, and breathing nothing as it seemed but the smell of rum and mackintosh. Gummy !

" After a bit I found myself going up a steepish sort of slope. I had another squint to see if anything was visible of the canoes and boats, and then kept on. I stopped with my head a foot from the surface, and tried to see where I was going, but of course nothing was to be seen but the reflection of the bottom. Then out I dashed. Directly I got my eyes out of the water, I saw I'd come up a kind of beach near the forest. I had a look round, but the natives and the brig were both hidden by a big hummucky kind of heap of rubbly and twisted lava. The constitutional fool in me suggested a run for the woods. I didn't take the helmet off, but I eased open one of the windows, and went on out of the water. You'd hardly imagine how clean and light the air tasted.

" Of course with four inches of lead in your boot soles and your head in a copper knob the size of a football, and after thirty-five minutes under water, you don't break any records running. I ran like a ploughboy going to work. And half-way to the trees I saw a dozen niggers or more, coming out in a gaping astonished sort of way to meet me.

" I just stopped dead and cursed myself for all the fools out of London. I had about as much chance of cutting back as a turtle. I just screwed up my window again to leave my hands free, and waited for them. There wasn't anything else for me to do.

" But they didn't come on very much. I began to realise why. ' Jimmy Goggles,' I says, ' it's your beauty does it.' I was inclined to be a little light-headed, I think, with all these dangers about and the change in the pressure of the air. ' Who're ye staring at ? ' I said, as if the savages could hear me. ' What d'ye take me for ? I'm hanged if I don't give you something to stare at,' I said ; and with that I screwed up the escape valve and turned on the compressed air, until I was swelled out like a blown frog.

" Regular imposing it must have been. I'm blessed if they'd come on a step ; and presently one and then another went down on their hands and knees. They didn't know what to make of me, and they were doing the extra polite. I had half a mind to edge back seaward and cut and run, but it seemed altogether too hopeless. A step back and they'd have been after me. And out of sheer desperation I began to march towards them up the beach, with slow heavy steps, and waving my blown-out arms about in a dignified manner. And inside of me I was singing as small as a tom-tit.

" But there's nothing like a striking appearance to help a man over a difficulty, as I've found before and since. People like ourselves, who're up to diving dresses by the time we're seven, can scarcely imagine the effect of one on a simple-minded savage. One or two of these niggers cut and ran, the others started in a great hurry trying to knock their brains out on the ground. And

on I went as slow and solemn and silly-looking as a jobbing plumber. It was evident they took me for something immense.

"Then up jumped one and began pointing, making extraordinary gestures to me as he did so, and all the others began sharing their attention between me and something out at sea. 'What's the matter now?' I said. I turned slowly, on account of my dignity, and there I saw, coming round a point, the poor old *Pride of Banya*, towed by a couple of canoes. The sight fairly made me sick. But they evidently expected some recognition, so I waved my arms in a striking sort of non-committal manner. And then I turned and stalked on towards the trees again.

"But these niggers weren't going to let me walk through and away like that. They started a kind of bowing dance about me, and sort of pressed me to take a pathway that lay through the trees. It was clear to me they didn't take me for a British citizen, whatever else they thought of me.

"You'd hardly believe it, perhaps, unless you're familiar with savages, but these poor misguided ignorant creatures took me straight to their kind of joss place, to present me to the blessed old black stone there.

"By this time I was beginning to sort of realise the depths of their ignorance, and directly I set eyes on this deity I took my cue. I started a baritone howl—'Wow-wow,' very long on one note—and began waving my arms about a lot, and then very slowly and ceremoniously turned their image over on its side and sat down on it. I wanted to sit down badly, for diving dresses ain't much as wear in the tropics. It took away their breath, I could see, my sitting on their joss, but in less time than a minute they made up their minds, and were hard at work worshipping me. And I can tell you I felt a bit relieved to see things turning out so well, in spite of the weight on my shoulders and feet.

"But what made me anxious was what the chaps in the canoes might think when they came back. If they'd seen me in the boat before I went down and without the helmet on—for they might have been spying and hiding since overnight—they would very possibly take a different view. I was in a deuce of a stew about that for hours, until the shindy of the arrival began.

"But they took it down, the whole blessed village took it down. At the cost of sitting up, stiff and stern, as much like those sitting Egyptian figures one sees as I could manage, for pretty nearly twelve hours, I should guess at least, on end, I saved my life and secured the situation. I don't think any of them dreamt of the man inside. I was just a wonderful leathery great joss that had come up with luck out of the water. But the fatigue! the heat! the beastly closeness! the mackintoshiness and the rum! the perpetual anxiety and the fuss!

"They lit a stinking fire on a kind of lava slab there was before me, and brought in a lot of gory muck—the worst parts of what they were feasting on outside, the beasts!—and burnt it all in my honour. I was getting a bit hungry, but I quite understand now how gods manage to do without eating, with the smell of burnt offerings about them. And they brought in a lot of the stuff they'd got off the brig, and what I was a bit relieved to see, the kind of pneumatic pump that was used for the compressed air affair, and then a lot of chaps and girls came in and danced about me something disgraceful.

"It's extraordinary the different ways different people have of showing respect. If I'd had a hatchet handy, I'd have gone for the lot of them, they made me feel so wild with them. All this time I sat as stiff as company, not knowing anything better to do. And at last when nightfall came, and the wattle joss-house place got a bit too shadowy for their taste—all these here savages are afraid of the dark, you know—they built big bonfires outside and left me alone in peace in the darkness of my hut, free to unscrew my windows and think things over.

"I was weak and hungry, and my mind kept on behaving like a beetle on a pin—tremendous activity and nothing done at the end of it. Come round just where it was before. There was the treasure down there in the *Ocean Pioneer* and how one might get it and hide it somewhere safe and get away and come back for it. And there was the puzzle where to get anything to eat. I tell you I was fair rambling. I was afraid to ask by signs for food, for fear of seeming too human; so there I sat and hungered until very near the dawn.

"Then the village got a bit quiet and I went out and stole some stuff like artichokes in a bowl and some sour milk. What was left of these I put away among the other offerings, just to give them a hint of my tastes. And in the morning they came to worship, and found me sitting up stiff and

respectable on their previous god, just as they'd left me overnight. I'd got my back against the central pillar of the hut and, practically, I was asleep. And that's how I became a god among the heathens—a false god, no doubt, and blasphemous, but one can't always pick and choose.

" Now, I don't want to crack myself up as a god beyond my merits, but I must confess that while I was god to these people they were really extraordinarily successful. I don't say there's anything in it, mind you. They won a battle with another tribe—they had wonderful fishing, and their crop of pourra was exceptionally fine. And they also counted the capture of the brig among my benevolent proceedings. I must say I don't think that was a poor record for a perfectly new hand. And, though perhaps you'd scarcely credit it, I was the tribal god of those beastly savages for pretty nearly four months.

" What else could I do, man? But I didn't wear that diving dress all the time. I made 'em rig me up a sort of holy of holies; and a deuce of a time I had too, making them understand what it was I wanted them to do. That indeed was the great difficulty—making them understand my commands. I couldn't let myself down by talking their lingo badly, and I couldn't go flapping a lot of gestures at them. So I drew pictures in sand and sat down beside them and hooted like one o'clock. Sometimes they did the things I wanted all right, and sometimes they did them all wrong. They were always very willing.

" All the while I was puzzling how I was to get the confounded business settled. Every night before the dawn, I used to march out in full rig and go off to a place where I could see the channel in which the *Ocean Pioneer* lay sunk, and once even, one moonlight night, I tried to walk out to her, but the weeds, and rocks, and dark clean beat me. I didn't get back till full day, and then I found all those silly niggers out on the beach praying their sea-god to return to them. I was that vexed and tired, messing and tumbling about, and coming up and going down again, I could have punched their silly heads all round. I'm hanged if I like so much ceremony.

" And then came the missionary. It was in the afternoon, and I was sitting in state in my outer temple place when he came. I heard a row outside and jabbering, and then his voice speaking to an interpreter. ' They worship stocks and stones,' he said, and I knew what was up in a flash.

" I had one of my windows out for comfort, and I sang out straight away on the spur of the moment. ' Stocks and stones ! ' I says. ' You come inside,' I says, ' and I'll punch your blooming head.'

" There was a kind of silence, and more jabbering, and in he came, Bible in hand, after the manner of them, a little sandy chap in specs, and a pith helmet. I flatter myself that me sitting there in the shadows, with my copper head and my big goggles, struck him a bit of a heap at first. ' Well,' I says, 'how's the trade in calico ? ' For I don't hold with missionaries.

" I had a lark with that missionary. He was a raw hand, and quite outclassed with a man like me. He gasped out who was I, and I told him to read the inscription at my feet if he wanted to know. Down he goes to read it, and his interpreter, being of course as superstitious as any of them, took it as an act of worship and plumped like a shot. All my people gave a kind of howl of triumph, and there wasn't any more business to be done in my village, not by the likes of him.

" But of course I was a fool to choke him off like that. If I'd had any sense I should have told him straightaway of the treasure, and taken him into Co. A child could have seen the connection between my diving-dress and the loss of the *Ocean Pioneer*. A week after he left I went out one morning, and saw the ' Motherhood,' the salvers' ship from Starr Race towing up channel and sounding. The whole blessed game was up, and all my trouble thrown away. Gummy ! How wild I felt ! And guying it in that stinking silly dress ! "

The sunburnt man's story degenerated again.

" Think of it ! " he said; " forty thousand pounds' worth of gold ! "

" Did the little missionary come back ? " I asked.

" Oh, yes, bless him ! And he pledged his reputation there was a man inside the god, and started out to see as much.

" But there wasn't—he got sold again. I always did hate scenes and explanations, and long before he came I was out of it all—going home to Banya along the coast. No clothes, no money, nothing. And just a squeak of eight thousand pounds of gold—fifth share. But the natives cut up rusty, thank goodness, because they thought it was him had driven their luck away."

"Tinker—Tailor—"

A little man and a big determination

By I. A. R. WYLIE

"TINKER—tailor——" She stopped short with the laugh of someone who has stumbled over a little joke and threw a glance at her companion on the other side of the table. He laughed back, and she continued to count her cherry stones solemnly: "Tinker—tailor—soldier—sailor—beggarman—thief—tinker—tailor—soldier——". The cherry stones ran out. She counted them again, but they remained obstinately the same number, and she shook her head at them. "There, now—isn't that stupid? Only one wrong. If there'd been one less it would have been like a good omen, wouldn't it, Alf?"

"Oh, I don't know," he said. "Don't believe much in that sort of thing myself. A bit 'eathenish, I think. Why, you can see there isn't nothing in it. Soldier! Now, would you marry a soldier, Jenny—one of these sleek-'aired lamp-posts in clothes so tight they couldn't 'it a fly without bustin' theirselves? No, you wouldn't be seen doing it. No respectable girl would. And besides"—he insinuated his foot surreptitiously and tenderly against hers—"there's little me in the way, isn't there?"

She pushed the cherry stones disconsolately about her plate. She had a way of holding her spoon—the little finger genteelly extended—which always made him feel how unworthy he was of her. He withdrew his foot shamefacedly.

"P'raps if I hadn't taken that second lot it would have been all right," she lamented. "It was you who made me have them. I didn't want them. And now—I can't help it—I feel all unsettled. It's no good making fun of these things, Alf. There was my Aunt Sarah—very careful she was—but one day she walked under a ladder, and three days later she was took ill. She knew what it was. 'My dear,' she said, 'it's all over with me,' and just folded her hands and died. The doctor said—Alf, if you're laughing——"

"I'm not laughing." He moved his plate on one side to make room for his elbows, and his small Cockney face flushed with earnestness. He brought all his masculine logic to bear upon her. "Look 'ere, Jenny, we'll get this straight. You're going to marry me, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"And I'm not a soldier, am I?"

"No."

"Well, there you are, then! What's there to make a fuss about."

"I'm not making a fuss."

"I wouldn't be a soldier—not if I was paid ten quid a week for it," he went on. "I tell you what, Jenny—you won't have to be ashamed of me one of these days. I'm an artist—yes, I am—a sort of artist; any man wot's got 'is 'eart in 'is job like I 'ave is an artist. And sometimes, Jenny, sometimes I feel sort of—sort of inspired. Yes, I do. I get an idea—I see something in my mind's eye—and I just puts my scissors to the cloth and cuts out something that you couldn't better in Conduit Street—without measuring—hardly knowing what I'm doing. That's an artist all over, Jenny. And old Solomon knows—oh, he knows all right. 'E's got 'is eye on me. If I threatened to leave 'e'd double my salary. But I'm not going to leave. I'm going to stick to the old firm and put life into it. One of these days it'll be 'Solomon and Tinker, Bond Street,' you see."

She looked at him doubtfully from under her long charcoaled eyelashes.

"How you do talk, Alf!"

"It isn't talk, Jenny. Shall I tell you who came into the shop the other day? A grumpy old chap 'e was, but smart—my word—with a figure—well, there's many a Piccadilly knut 'ud envy him. I made a morning suit for him—the best thing I ever did; not a crease, one fitting—and he was as pleased as a baby with a new rattle. Do you know who 'e was? Lord Alvingstone. Give you my word. Do you know what it means? That every swell in

town will be buzzing round our shop before the month's out. You'll see!"

She smiled; the cloud lifted a little. A waitress swept away the plate with the offending cherry stones.

"Sounds all right, Alf!"

"Of course it's all right, dear. One of these days it'll be Mrs. Alfred Tinker, The Lodge, Hampstead."

"Kensington, Alf. Kensington's classier than Hampstead."

"All right—Kensington, then."

"D'you think—really——?"

"Certain. And a run-about of our own—and—and—any other things—theatres—dress circle—and jolly little suppers afterwards—not in messy places like this—p'raps the Troc. and all that."

"Oh, Alf."

He smiled rather unsteadily. What with many lights and the many people and the string band sighing romantically through the buzz and clatter, he felt so happy that the tears rose and burnt the rims of his pale blue eyes.

"Better than Mrs. Sergeant-major, eh?"

They laughed together. He forgot the change which the waitress slapped down disrespectfully at his elbow. And all the way home Jenny Adams let him hold her hand.

II

HE remembered that evening five months afterwards. He remembered the very table they had sat at and the number of stains on the tablecloth. As to the cherry stones, the mere thought of them sent an uncanny thrill through his nerves. Without having made Shakespeare's acquaintance, young Alfred Tinker agreed with him that there were more things in heaven and earth than an ordinary fellow could make head or tail of, and the cherry-stone episode was one of them. Because that very afternoon Jenny Adams had said to him quite plainly:

"The fact is I've got to marry a soldier, Alf. I don't like being seen walking about with a civvy. It isn't respectable. It makes me ashamed, and my friends talk. You'd better think it over."

He was thinking it over now. He sat at his cutting-table under the green-shaded light and snapped unhappily at the air with his enormous scissors. The beautiful pair of khaki slacks that lay before him, awaiting the master-hand, seemed to him to express symbolically the opposing duties which tore his soul in twain. He had had no idea that, outside a penny novelette, mere moral issues could make anyone so entirely wretched.

"It's a case of art against 'eart," he thought, with awful humour.

His five assistants threw him occasional, respectful glances. To them this little fellow, with his shock of fair hair, feverish little face, and fiery, mystic eyes, was as a god. An inspired god—a poet—a being into whom the immortals had sent a breath of genius. They had seen him perform sartorial feats which they knew to be unrivalled in the history of their race. They were proud to breathe the same air with him. They boasted of him. They had only to say, "Tinker, of Solomon's," and people looked at them with a new interest. His fidelity to the musty old firm, in the face of unprecedented offers of bribery, filled them with respect and astonishment.

"Brooding over something new," Mr. Simpson whispered tensely to his neighbour. "You'll see, I know the look."

They subsided into reverential silence, and there was no sound but the snip of scissors and the subdued whir of a sewing-machine from the despised women's quarters. Then quite suddenly and almost violently Alf. Tinker flung himself off his high stool, and without even waiting to put on his coat, opened the glass door which led into the chief's office and disappeared.

"Well, he can do that sort of thing," Mr. Simpson remarked, sighing. "We'll never bang into the boss's lair without knocking—not in this life."

"His sort's always impetuous," his neighbour added knowingly. "Can't expect 'em to behave like ordinary human beings. 'Cause they aren't ordinary. If a man tries to curb his nature——" He broke off with a start. "Good gracious—what was that?"

They stared at each other. The sound had been explosive—agonised—was followed by a low yet passionate outburst, in which they recognised the Hebraic accents of Mr. Samuel Solomon. Once Alfred Tinker's clearer voice intervened, but it was swept away like a straw on a flood.

"It's come at last," said Mr. Simpson significantly. "He's going. And what can you expect? I know for a fact that Feversham offered him a cool thousand just to start with. A man can't afford to sneeze at that sort of thing."

"Poor old Solomon—he's taking it hard."

He was taking it very hard indeed. He was crying. And Alfred Tinker cried with him. He was terribly over-wrought on his own account, and the sight of this stout, bald-headed little man, with the bowed shoulders of one on whom Fortune has never smiled, shaking with sobs, completed his distress. He rubbed the tears off his cheek with his cuff and sniffed shamelessly.

"Now, Mr. Solomon—don't—don't you take it like that—I can't bear it. You know I wouldn't go—not for any money in the world; but this is different. You know how it is, Mr. Solomon, I'm a young chap—and—and—dash it—if the country needs you——"

Mr. Solomon lifted his face out of his hands. In spite of its elderly fatness, it was a rather child-like, pathetic face, and the smear of grief was not altogether comic.

"And doesn't your country need you—here?" he quavered shrilly. "Think, Tinker, think! Do you want our fine young men to face the Germans with their breeches cut by that poor doddering Simpson? Don't you realise how it takes the heart out of the bravest to know that his tunic rucks at the back? Haven't you ever heard of the wonderful courage and confidence of a man in a perfect fit? Tinker, do you know what Captain Hodge said to me only this morning? 'Solomon, old bean,' he said, 'there's many a German 'll rue the day when I go over the top in these jolly old togs.' Those were his very words, Tinker. And could he have got those jolly old togs anywhere else? No, you know he couldn't. Nowhere. And do I overcharge? Do I profiteer? You know I don't. I make it possible for the poorest hero to face the enemy in the habiliments of a gentleman. Isn't that patriotic work, Tinker? And aren't you my partner? Yes, Tinker, I said my partner—in spirit and in fact, Tinker. And what more can I say?"

Alfred drew himself up gravely.

"You didn't need to say so much, Mr. Solomon," he said. "I'm not after partnerships—not now anyway. I want to do what's right. It's not easy to sit safe and cosy cutting out clothes for other chaps to fight in, and I don't like it—I don't like the feel of it."

Mr. Solomon appeared not to hear. He seemed to be immersed in a slough of hopeless meditation.

"It's hard, Tinker—very hard. All my life I've been fighting for the old business—trying to make it go, trying to make a decent living out of it—and everything's gone wrong—everything's been against me. Sometimes when I've thought of the future—of my poor wife and children and of their future when I'm gone—I've felt as though it were all too much for me. And now when a gleam of light breaks—when the right sort of customer comes along—you leave me—you leave me in the lurch, Tinker."

"No, sir, I don't—I wouldn't." Alfred choked in his emotion. "You know I wouldn't, not if I could help it; but my girl, Miss Adams, said——"

Mr. Solomon pounced on him like a terrier on a rat.

"A woman! Aha, a woman! Didn't I know a woman was at the bottom of it? You—you, a grown man, you allow yourself to be hoodwinked by a vain, flighty creature like that? Don't you know what the Bible says about women? Have you not read of Samson and Delilah? From the days of Adam woman has been man's undoing, and now you, Tinker—you——" He clenched his podgy hands and brought them down with a challenging bang on the table. "My son, look yourself in the face; ask yourself, is it patriotism or is it the bright eye of a woman that persuaded you to forsake your post in this hour of crisis? I know that you are an honest boy. If you can answer me truthfully that it is pure patriotism—why, then, I will be silent; I will say no more; I will watch the foundering of my last hope in resignation. Think and answer."

Alfred found it difficult even to think. As to answering truthfully, it appeared that truth was not the simple, straightforward business that the Sunday School would have us imagine. "What is truth?" Alfred questioned in his own language. Was patriotism or Jenny Adams at the bottom of his resolution? Did he want to set forth to satisfy his conscience or Jenny Adams's predilection for khaki? What was the nation's most pressing need—a great tailor or a small fighter?

"Think!" repeated Mr. Solomon even more dramatically.

Alfred thought. Perspiration gathered beneath the shock of disordered hair. He pressed his fists down on Mr. Solomon's table as though he were trying to squeeze something out of it.

" I—I'd like to 'ave a go at them blighters myself," he answered quite unexpectedly.

Mr. Solomon flapped his short arms like a wounded penguin.

" So it is to please yourself you go ? You leave your post of national duty—you leave the poor old firm to ruin, to please—not even a woman—but your own vanity—a paltry love of excitement—a primitive lust for slaughter ? Isn't that so ? Answer me."

" No, no ; it isn't—I mean—I don't want to really—I'd hate it—only—oh, Lord !"

For Mr. Solomon had begun to cry again.

Now Alfred, like all true artists, was a man of feeling. Mr. Solomon's eloquence had shaken him. He went under completely in Mr. Solomon's tears. " I want to do what's right," he stammered hoarsely. " Look here, Mr. Solomon, I put it to you —what would you do in my place ? I've confidence in you, Mr. Solomon. You've always dealt straight with me. I'll take your word. What would you do ? You tell me that, and I'll do it."

Mr Solomon became calm and judicial.

" Do ? " he said. " I would wait. When my country pointed at me and said clearly, ' Samuel Solomon, we need your sword more than your scissors,' then I would go. Not before. My duty would be quite clear to me."

" Give you my word ! " said Alfred Tinker between his teeth.

He offered a trembling hand, but Mr. Solomon rose up passionately and kissed him. He was almost as pathetic in his joy as he had been in his sorrow, and Alfred bore with him patiently. But when he went back to his work-table the five assistants gazed at their hero with anxious astonishment. He did not look like a man who had wrung a partnership or a thousand-pound bonus out of a desperate employer. He looked dejected—almost broken. And the khaki slacks that took shape in that hour were never reckoned among the master's great efforts. They lacked the inimitable touch. They were, as Mr. Simpson admirably phrased it, perfect, but uninspired.

III

THAT night, at the corner of Oxford Circus, Jenny Adams decided briefly but firmly, " that it wouldn't do," and that " it wasn't good enough." Her manner was distrait, and it was quite evident even to Alfred's blurred and aching perceptions that she had an appointment elsewhere. He was thankful for her indifference and the darkness which hid something of his abject misery.

" If you'd only wait a bit, Jenny," he pleaded, but without hope. " After all, it isn't always easy to do the right thing."

" Not for some chaps," she admitted scathingly. " But it's got to be for the chap I marry."

As a perfect lady she returned the engagement ring, to which she had tied, very neatly, a white feather.

After that night Alfred Tinker was a changed man. He worked feverishly, brilliantly. The fame of him reached the Marines and reverberated through the Guards' mess. From the dismal little shop in the City the firm migrated into Bond Street, and the gilded vestibule scintillated with everything naval and military from a snotty to a brass-hat. The staff took on twenty fresh workers, and in spite of increasing bulk Mr. Solomon gave the impression of one who keeps his feet on earth only by a conscious effort. But from Alfred Tinker the joy of life seemed to have departed utterly. He had been a gay little fellow—a good pal—up to any harmless lark ; always ready with a helping hand or a good word. He became morose, brooding, unsociable. He came to the workroom with his pockets stuffed with morning papers, which he read passionately through the lunch hour. Anyone who interrupted him suffered terrifying results. When the war news was bad or some fresh atrocity had been committed his twenty-five assistants avoided him as they would have avoided an irritable tiger.

" Why——" he burst out once in a gust of too long suppressed fury, " why, in Heaven's name, if they want men don't they fetch 'em ? All this damn shilly-shallying ! Why don't they get on with things—rake us all in ? What the blazes are they waiting for ? There's some blasted Germans behind all this mucking about, I know. Ought to call up every man in the country—they ought——"

Mr. Simpson, though slightly shocked at the display of language, was nervously conciliatory.

" Well—it's a good thing for Solomon and Co. that they don't," he said. " Supposing they got you, Mr. Tinker ? "

Alfred Tinker glared at him in awful silence.

About a month later a change came. His unapproachableness remained, but it had lost its ferocity. He went about his work like a man whose eyes are fixed on some distant vision. He did not answer when he was spoken to, simply because he did not hear, and a faint, persistent smile lit up his small, pugnacious features. He pored over the Parliamentary reports as a lover pores over the letters of his beloved.

On the night that the Conscription Bill passed its third reading the crisis came. Alfred Tinker went out and spent the night in a police-cell—gloriously, speechlessly drunk.

IV

IT was a rather curious roomful. The occupants had arrived in pairs, and they sat in pairs, close together like grotesque love-birds. Each pair was made up of an old man and a young man. The old men wore a look of grim responsibility, and the young men were nervous and self-conscious. They seemed to find a great difficulty in keeping still, and every time the door opened and a policeman peered through, searching for his quarry, they jerked from their seats as though someone had run a pin into them. Whenever a pair returned from their visit to the inner sanctuary their bearing was intently scrutinised. Cheerfulness evidently aroused sullen dislike, depression, a rather malicious sympathy. As the day wore on sandwiches and converted medicine bottles were produced from bulging side-pockets, but were not successful in relieving the general tension and rapidly increasing gloom.

One pair, however, differed markedly from the rest. For one thing, their attitude towards one another was peculiar. When they spoke at all it was with a gravity tinged with dejection. But most of the time they were silent, and their expressions were then extraordinarily elate. They were like two mourners at the funeral of a wealthy unloved relative, who were constantly endeavouring to impress each other with their disinterested grief. The old man was stout, Hebraic, and wonderfully attired; his charge, whose upturned nose denied kinship, was small and wiry, with intense blue eyes and a sensitive mouth that from time to time quivered spasmodically, either with distrust or an icipient grin—it was hard to tell which. When the policeman demanded the forthcoming of one "Alfred Tinker," however, he rose briskly in answer to the summons, and his companion brought up a portentous rear.

"Seems mighty sure of himself!"

"Another bloomin' indispensable!"

"Call it fair play! I don't think!"

But the door slammed and the mutterers subsided again into indignant silence.

The adjoining room was furnished meagrely with a long table, accommodating three elderly gentlemen, and a small desk, placed a little to one side, which supported the elbows of an aloof, obviously disapproving onlooker in khaki. Alfred Tinker occupied the centre of the stage. Mr. Samuel Solomon, top-hat in hand, stood at his elbow rather in an attitude of a best man at the altar, and to carry the simile further Alfred Tinker himself made a very representative bridegroom. He was elate, nervous, fidgety, and absent-minded. He answered questions as to his name and occupation with some difficulty, as though they were matters on which he could not be expected to possess any certain information. But on the whole his bearing was resigned and manly, and the khaki individual noted him with some approval.

"Graded A1?"

"Yes, sir."

"Claiming total exemption?"

"No, sir—I don't—at least——"

"I do," said Mr. Solomon, "for my partner."

The khaki individual sneered openly.

"On what grounds?"

"As being indispensable to my business."

"And your business?"

"I consider indispensable to the well-being of His Majesty's Forces."

Everyone laughed. Mr. Solomon himself smiled, but it was the subtle smile of one who alone knows the true inwardness of his joke. Alfred Tinker looked at the military representative. He wanted badly to wink at him—to encourage him to extreme ruthlessness, and was rather daunted to observe that that individual's expression had undergone a sudden change. He frowned. He tapped his forehead with his penholder in the evident endeavour to remember. These symptoms Alfred Tinker noted with an unreasoning sinking of the heart, and from that moment his bearing lost its jauntiness.

"And what is your business?" the military gentleman demanded abruptly. "What's your name?"

"Solomon—Samuel Solomon," said Mr. Solomon, bowing to him.

"Samuel Solomon," murmured his questioner in the accents of dawning recollection.

"Of Bond Street," Mr. Solomon added softly.

"Then"—the pen-holder indicated Alfred—"this is the Tinker?"

"The Tinker," Mr. Solomon agreed, with the complacent gravity of one who, on invitation, lays a grand slam hand on the table. "The Tinker, as you say, sir."

"Well—then—of course."

The military individual left his position at the desk. He went and sat down by the three elderly gentlemen, and addressed them in an undertone. He made little movements with his hands, as though his feelings had got the better of his natural stoicism, and the three elderly gentlemen looked at Alfred Tinker intently and almost respectfully. Their quite obvious intention to give short shrift to a flagrant young shirker had vanished. They nodded rhythmically to the military representative's earnest ejaculations, amongst which the listeners caught: "Perfect cut—inimitable—I assure you—at half a day's notice—no fitting—had it from the fellow himself—breeches—nothing like them in England—no profiteering—a national institution, by Jove!"

"Exactly—exactly," murmured one of the elderly gentlemen.

Mr. Solomon stared into the crown of his top-hat with an expression of almost superhuman detachment.

"Look here now," Alfred Tinker began passionately.

The chairman smiled at him.

"As the military representative himself recommends your exemption," he said "we shall, of course, raise no objection, and you will be——"

"If you know wot I'd gone through with this damn business," Alfred Tinker interrupted violently, "worrying and fussing eating my 'eart out over the 'ole thing, dyin' to 'ave a go on my own and be able to look the girls—the other chaps—in the face—and now when I think my time's come at last——"

"The fact is," said Mr. Solomon, interposing himself with unexpected grace, "my partner's position is a very painful one. He is a patriot and he has a conscience. From the beginning of the war he has wished to throw himself and, I may say, his art into the carnage. I confess I have endeavoured to restrain him. We old people have a duty to perform towards hot-headed youth, gentlemen, and I felt it my duty to point out that a man with a poor physique but an inimitable talent is of more use to his country in his workshop than in the trenches. Mr. Tinker had to admit the force of my argument and gave his word that he would hold back until his country called him directly. The decision is now in your hands, and I am sure my partner will abide by it. Won't you, Alfred?"

"Oh, damn!" said Alfred Tinker bitterly.

The chairman's expression was genuinely touched. He removed his glasses and wiped them with a silk handkerchief.

"Your impulse does you credit, Mr. Tinker," he said; "at the same time we must none of us be swayed by mere sentimentality. It is our duty to see that each man is fixed in the place in which he can use his faculties to the utmost, and it is quite clear to me that for the present, at any rate, you are doing the most good where you are. We therefore grant you six months' exemption, at the end of which time you can appeal again——"

"But it may all be over by then!" Alfred Tinker protested hoarsely.

"Let us hope so." The chairman indulged in a mild facetiousness. "I'm afraid we shan't want to continue the war even to oblige you, Mr. Tinker"

Mr. Solomon took Alfred by the elbow.

"Come, my dear fellow," he urged gently. "Come——"

Alfred Tinker came. His thick, fair hair stood on end as though he had been through some physical struggle. His eyes were red-rimmed and so desperately wretched that the remaining supplicants in the adjoining room had no doubt as to his fate.

"Got it full in the neck, he has!" they whispered.

"And serve him right, too. A young upstanding fellow like him! Now there are cases of real 'ardship. Take a man like myself with a wife and child and a varicose vein."

Outside, Mr. Solomon had hailed a taxi. It was an unusual extravagance, but he felt that the occasion and Alfred Tinker's appearance warranted it. He had the tact to withhold congratulations, and even the twenty-five assistants welcomed their rescued hero in awed silence.

For two months Alfred Tinker stood it. Then on the day of the sinking of the *Lovena* he dramatically and completely vanished.

V

THE Redmonthshires—otherwise known in the Service as the "Always-too-late-to-mends"—was not a distinguished regiment when Alfred Tinker joined it. In the present war it had not yet seen active service, and its banners were innocent of battle honours. The only martial episode with which it had been connected was the suppression of an insignificant riot in a manufacturing district for which, however, it arrived several hours too late. At other more critical periods in the Empire's history the Redmonthshires were equally unfortunate. They were either ordered elsewhere at the opening of hostilities or they arrived with the armistice, and their appearance came to be regarded as synonymous with peace. Probably, as a direct result of this reputation, it was an inexpensive regiment, with low messing bills and a relatively low standard of dress. It followed also that only determined, if impecunious, soldiers sought admission to its ranks, and that there was no body of men in the British Army more passionately athirst for glory. Their attitude towards all facetiousness was one of grim reticence touched with acerbity. They became fanatics with one thought, one hope, one purpose, and, like most fanatics, they were not popular.

It cannot be said that the advent of Alfred Tinker—alias Alfred Taylor at this period—added substantially to the Redmonthshires' chances of renown. He was smaller than any other man in the regiment, and for all the passionate goodwill which he put into his work it never roused his N.C.O. to anything but more or less tolerant disgust. An artist remained an artist. Alfred, in the midst of an intricate manœuvre, would catch sight of his lieutenant's tunic, and in a minute all would be forgotten, but the craving to get at it and at least relieve its worst symptoms. The ensuing disaster to himself and his whole company worried but could not cure him. Only on route marches, with a will to endure and a mind free to wander, did he come out with flying colours.

And Alfred was happy. He had never been so happy in his life. An intolerable burden seemed to have been lifted from him. In times of deep disgrace, with the wrath of his sergeant breaking over him in veritable cascades, it was difficult to conceal his deep inner contentment. His light-heartedness became proverbial, and on peculiarly trying occasions was suspected as half-witted. When he walked abroad he swaggered, and at night time he lay awake and dreamed dreams that had the advantage of being based on real possibilities. Sometimes it was a V.C., and sometimes, in the less giddy moments, a D.C.M. Sometimes he contented himself with a sergeant's stripes, but more often he had a commission and a uniform made with his own hands. Always he met Jenny Adams. A chance meeting, you understand. He saw her start, her look of amazement, followed, as her eye counted his decorations, by grief, pride, shame, and unavailing regret. Sometimes he passed on with a grave, unrecognising countenance. Or, because he had a faithful heart, he took her into the old familiar café, and at the self-same table told her the story of his exploits.

"Do you remember the cherry stones?" he would ask, with a sad playfulness.

And then she would cry, and he would squeeze her hand under the table and assure her that all was forgiven and forgotten.

At this point the dream ended. Alfred Tinker-Taylor came back to the necessary preliminaries, and his last thought was a most earnest prayer.

"Oh, God, give a fellow a chance! Make them blighters send us out soon——"

VI

THE tragedy came, as tragedies often come, with a deceptively auspicious countenance. First as a wild rumour, and then as a glorious certainty, it became known to the rank and file of the Redmonthshires that they were destined for the front. A wave of excitement swept the regiment. At last the time had come for them to show the world what they were made of. Haunted by their unhappy past, they scanned the newspaper for a suggestion that hostilities might cease before their arrival, and the very word "peace," even when uttered accidentally, reduced them to a state of blasphemous fury.

First there was to be an inspection. As a rule an inspection meant for the Redmonthshires a great deal of extra polishing, a

tiresome afternoon spent in the broiling sun or the pouring rain (it was always one or the other), and some dug-out old general or a camouflaged civilian pacing up and down their lines trying to look eagle-eyed and intelligent. They had a poor opinion of inspection. But as a preliminary to greater things—as a sort of " send off "—it was to be endured, and a certain solemnity marked the final preparations. According to custom, Alfred Tinker was arranged carefully where his insignificant stature and mental aberrations were least likely to excite attention.

" And if you so much as blink an eyelid when the General passes," remarked Sergeant Nobbins unpleasantly, " I'll make you wish you'd never seen the light."

Alfred had no intention of blinking. If ever a man was filled with martial ardour, with the determination to bring glory upon his company and himself, that man was Alfred as the inspecting General, with Colonel MacHamish, bore down the line. And yet a moment later—suddenly, incredibly—he bent down. Deliberately, fastidiously, he brushed an imaginary speck of dust from his immaculate boots. A roar like that of a goaded bull came from somewhere in the near distance, and he stood up again, not erect, however, but with bowed head like a man plunged in profound reflection.

There are some events which pass beyond the range of language, and even of human emotion. For this reason possibly Sergeant Nobbins was almost gentle with Alfred as he escorted him to the Colonel's quarters.

" I don't know what he'll do to you," he reflected. " They put a man up against a wall for almost anything these days, and I'm sorry for you—though maybe it'll be all for the best in the end." He looked at Alfred's haggard face attentively. " Something on your conscience, eh?" he jerked out.

" Yes," said Alfred.

" Hiding from justice? " pursued the sergeant triumphantly.

" Something like it."

" Murder? "

" Oh, worse—worse! " Alfred answered with passionate bitterness.

" Good Lord! " exclaimed Sergeant Nobbins respectfully.

Colonel MacHamish and his Adjutant received Alfred. They had evidently been in close discussion, and their manner in dismissing Sergeant Nobbins convinced that personage that the matter in hand was of international importance. Alfred remained alone to face his judges. He looked hunted and stubborn, and piteous, like a small animal in a large trap.

" To begin with," said Colonel MacHamish, referring to a charge sheet, " your name is not Taylor."

" I enlisted as A. Taylor," Alfred stated in a high, anxious voice. " I am A. Taylor and if anyone says I'm not——"

" That will do. ' A. Taylor, a tailor.' Very pretty! " Colonel MacHamish nodded at the Adjutant, who relaxed his usual air of aloof dignity and laughed quite boyishly. " No evasions now; your real name, please, and no nonsense." The Colonel's voice was severe, his expression almost playful. Alfred lost all self-control.

" I shan't," he said. " I don't see whose business it is who I am. I haven't done anything to anyone. I've got as much right as anyone else to be a soldier; it's not fair."

" You're asking for court-martial, my man," the Adjutant interrupted coldly.

" I don't care. Then p'raps I'd get justice."

" Besides you're recognised," Colonel MacHamish remarked. " Lord Alvingstone recognised you."

Alfred made a noise like a choked sob.

" I knew he would; it was that damned morning suit. He said he'd never forget it."

" Your real name is Alfred Tinker? "

" Yes, it is, and I don't see——"

" The Tinker? "

" Yes," said Alfred brokenly.

Colonel MacHamish paced thoughtfully backwards and forwards. Suddenly he stopped short and looked over his shoulder like a man trying to inspect the small of his back.

" What do you think of it? " he asked.

Alfred Tinker's glazed eyes followed the Colonel's gaze, and brightened with contempt and a dawning eagerness.

" Awful," he said; " the left sleeve's put in wrong."

" I knew it," said Colonel MacHamish. " I felt it. Could anything be done? "

" If I were alone with that tunic for half an hour," Alfred Tinker began, and then dropped into a stricken silence.

Colonel MacHamish resumed his pacing.

" Yesterday you disgraced the regiment, Tinker," he said. " You realise that, don't you? "

The easy tears were in Alfred's eyes.

"Yes, sir—I do—only——"

"And you'd do anything in your power to make reparation?"

"Yes, sir," said Alfred sadly and hopelessly.

"It lies in your power. The fact is, Tinker, you're a poor soldier. You always will be a poor soldier. I don't see that you have a single soldierly quality. Yet your enlistment under an assumed name proves that your intentions are most creditable. And your cut, of course, is world-famous. Now, Tinker, the regiment you have joined—is going to be one of the famous regiments of the war—it ought to go out equipped in a way worthy of its—ah—its future. Unfortunately—I speak to you, Tinker, as one man to another—we are not a wealthy regiment. Our officers cannot afford to procure themselves uniforms from the best men. You have no doubt observed the result. Beside Guardsmen we cut a poor figure. This is not as it should be. It lies with you, Tinker, whether things remain as they are or whether the Redmonthshires become the smartest, as well as the finest, regiment in the British Army. You see my meaning?"

"Yes, sir," said Alfred tonelessly.

"In fact," said the Colonel with a triumphant and solemn gesture, "I have determined to detail you for special service. I create a post for you. From henceforward you will serve your country as regimental tailor."

In an incredibly short space of time the news spread to wherever the British Army upheld the glory of the Empire. The Guards heard it and looked askance. Line regiments gnashed their teeth. Mr. Samuel Solomon put his head down on a roll of valuable cloth and wept.

And Alfred Tinker stood at the window of his commodious workroom where his five assistants toiled day and night for the splendour of the Redmonthshires, and watched the regiment swing out grandly through the barrack gates. He listened to the call of the bugles and the martial thunder of the band as it played the tired men home. He felt in his very blood the stir and thrill of the great hour for which eight hundred men had lived and worked and prayed.

But what was in Alfred Tinker's heart must not be told. It was too sad.

VII

SHE stood, arms akimbo, and watched him. He did not know that he was being watched, and his depression was unconsciously and pathetically conspicuous. It isolated him from his fellows. He sat hunched up in the corner, and the bowl of soup that steamed up into his face might have been a witch's cauldron in which a most unpleasant future had been brewed for him. But he was a nice-looking fellow, she considered, and anyhow life's no joke for anyone.

"Well," she said finally, "what's the matter? Thinking about the Ritz? Isn't it good enough for you?"

He jumped up violently and went red to the roots of his fair hair.

"Oh—no—it's fine——"

"Well, then—why don't you eat it up? Don't like to see good food wasted. Besides, I cooked it, you know. Not very polite of you."

He glanced up at her anxiously, and then, seeing that she was not really offended at all, he smiled and began to rattle his spoon with conciliatory energy.

"It's first class. I'm just off my feed, that's all."

"But you've marched fifteen miles since your last meal. The boys told me so."

"I didn't. Came in a transport wagon."

"Sick?" she asked.

"Sick of things," he muttered.

"Oh, well," she said. "Cheer up!"

She bustled off with a trayload of dirty plates that might have staggered a coal-heaver and presently bustled back with more plates and steaming bowls, which she set out before the new arrivals with skill and much kindly facetiousness. At first the Redmonthshires looked at her silently and wistfully, like tired children. They did not seem quite to understand how she came to be there. They had worked their way through such a slough of misery that a woman at the end of it all—and an Englishwoman to boot, rosy-cheeked, clear-eyed, frank-hearted—seemed as paradoxical and incredible as an angel in hell. More than warmth and food, she re-lit the courage in them. They began to forget themselves. In a dim, speechless way they were as proud of her as though she had belonged to them.

"Got pluck, that girl," said Sergeant Nobbins concisely. "Any 'uman being that sticks it out 'ere must 'ave pluck. Come

on ; let's 'ave a song, boys, just to show 'er we ain't down-'earted neither."

So after fifteen miles of ankle-deep mud they sang. The wooden shanty rang with their voices, and the much-tried piano tinkled a cracked but cheerful accompaniment.

But the little fellow with the fair hair continued to stare into his bowl of soup. And as distress attracts a woman as honey attracts a bee, it was not surprising that the rosy-cheeked girl in the khaki overall came back to the attack. In the first place, she took his ice-cold soup from him firmly but not unkindly.

" It's no use clinging to things you don't want," she said. " But you can't go on like this, you know. What's the tragedy anyhow ? Anything anyone can help about? You can talk to me if you like. I shan't laugh."

" Laugh ? " he said drearily. " Laugh ? "

" Oh, well—you know, men are that queer. Sentimental as any girl. Only they 'aven't the pluck to show it. What I mean is—if your worrying about your mammy—or—or anyone, you can pour it all out and I shall understand—seems it's part of my job here."

" What is your job ? " he asked gloomily.

" Looking after you fellows. I'm a W.A.A.C. Never heard of them in your village, I suppose. Look at my uniform."

He looked.

" Wants taking in on the shoulders," he commented.

She laughed.

" Fancy your seeing that ; yes, it does. Only I haven't time. What's 'er name ? "

" What's 'oose name ? "

" Oh, you know, you're worrying about 'er now—your girl."

" I 'aven't got a girl."

" Well, it's your mammy, then."

" I 'aven't got a mammy."

" Oh ! " she said. She became grave and sympathetic. " Must be rotten being all alone like that."

" There's worse things than being alone," he muttered.

" Yes ; I know, I've 'eard the other chaps talk about it—before they go up. When they come back they're different—quite cockahoop. You see, they've found out they aren't 'alf as afraid as they thought they were."

The little man gave a sudden hoot of satiric laughter.

" So you think I'm afraid, eh ? "

" Well, I don't know, of course. Lots are, and no shame to 'em ; it don't mean anything. There was a chap 'ere six months ago who cried on my shoulder like a baby the day before they went up. Got the V.C., 'e did."

" Oh, damn him ! " said the depressed young man with increased bitterness.

She shook her head disapprovingly.

" That's rude. Besides, I knows myself what it feels like. I used to think if ever I 'eard a bomb go off I'd faint right away, but I didn't, and I don't take no more notice of bombs than if they were tyres bursting. And we've been shelled too, often enough."

" Shelled ? " he echoed alertly. " Wot—'ere ? "

" I should say so. Only five miles be'ind the line, we are. But, of course, it's nothing to the real thing——"

He relapsed dismally.

" S'ppose not."

" And, any'ow, you oughtn't to grouse," she went on. " It ain't fair. It's a sort of going back on your pals——"

" I 'aven't got no pals." He turned his head away so that she should not see his face. " Sometimes I feel as though I was the only 'uman being in the whole bloomin' world," he said huskily.

She knew then that he had a secret sorrow, she had read about secret sorrows—mostly in the upper circles of society, but she had never hoped to meet one. Her heart went out to the mysteriously unhappy soldier. But she was not of a weak, sloppy nature. She gave him a firm, consoling pat on the shoulder.

" Well, as long as you're 'ere you can count on Cissie Edwards," she said cheerfully. " And when you're not here—as you haven't got no one—you can write to me if you like. I'm no great shakes at letter writing, but if it'll buck you up a bit ——"

" Why—you don't know who I am—or—what I am ! " he said incredulously.

" Yes—I do," she said. " You're lonely—and you're a soldier fightin' for old England—and—and any'ow I likes the look of you——"

Thereat unexpectedly she blushed.

Now Jenny Adams had never blushed. Her make-up, both spiritual and material, did not allow for such an expression of feeling. And a broken, unromantic, yet

very illuminating thought came to Alfred Tinker.

"Now if this girl was to wash 'er face she'd be rosier than ever—but if Jenny washed 'ers—if she ever did——"

He was chivalrous enough to leave it at that. But from that moment the ghost of Jenny Adams may be said to have faded out of Alfred Tinker's life for ever.

VIII

THE Redmonthshires rested three days before they were sent forward for the consummation of their passionate hopes. All the time that he could spare from his extemporary tailoring department in the Mairie, Alfred Tinker spent in the canteen. He resented with increasing bitterness the repairs and alterations which each officer seemed to consider a "necessary enemy." He became more than ever morose, and absent-minded. A roll of khaki corduroy, which had been specially ordered from England, was ruined in a fit of depression, and the Adjutant shook his head prophetically.

"If we don't take care," he said, "he'll break out——"

"And if he does," said the Colonel, who was in no temper to stand nonsense from anyone, "I'll have him shot."

The saying was judiciously brought to Alfred Tinker's notice and did little to increase his cheerfulness.

He spent his money on food he never ate. He would sit for an hour over a meat-pie, apparently purposeless, in reality waiting for the moment when Cissie Edwards would come his way. Or he would lean against the canteen counter, sipping an interminable cup of cocoa, watching her. And, though Cissie Edwards had never time for more than a nod and a smile, she knew. Moreover, Alfred knew that she knew. Between them there was, in fact, that most wonderful understanding which goes by the name of love-at-first-sight. Only it was overshadowed by the secret sorrow, and between the two of them, Alfred seemed to grow smaller and more intense and feverish-looking with every hour.

The last night came. The Redmonthshires who were to move out at midnight, enjoyed their last rest in dry billets, and the canteen was in half-darkness and very quiet so that the dull, monotonous gunfire which one forgot in the usual bustle and clatter struck the consciousness with a new and sinister force.

Alfred found Cissie Edwards at the counter counting prune stones and crying.

"Tinker—tailor—soldier—sailor——"

He put his hand over hers.

"Oh, please, don't!" he said.

They looked at each other. They were both very white and unhappy-eyed. If there were other people in the world at that moment they did not know it. Alfred found that he could not remove his hand.

"It's a silly game," said Cissie Edwards hoarsely. "I don't know why I did it."

Alfred shook his head.

"It's not silly. It comes true sometimes. I couldn't bear it—if it didn't come wot I wanted."

"It makes 'soldier,'" she said faintly.

But he did not answer. To her amazement she realised that he was trembling as though she had struck him, and her warm heart went out to him in deep pity and infinite misunderstanding.

"Mr. Tinker, don't take it like that," she said. "You'll come through; you'll come through; I'm sure you will."

"Oh, I'll come through," he muttered. "No fear of that." His grip on her hand tightened till it hurt, but she did not protest. "I made up my mind I wouldn't say nothing," he jerked out painfully, "and I won't. I won't. I 'aven't the right. If you knew wot I was you wouldn't look at me again. If you knew what I'd been doing all this time you'd 'ate the sight of me. I know you would; you couldn't 'elp yourself."

"I wouldn't," she said firmly and with much dignity. "I don't care wot you are or wot you've done. I know you're risking your life like a brave man, and anything you've done you shouldn't do, you'll make right when you get your chance.

"Oh, Gawd!" he groaned. Then, suddenly, he stood very straight. "Miss Edwards," he said, "either I wipes out my past or you don't see me again. If—if—I don't come back—you'll understand—I tried—won't you? And you'll know why—and not think hard things of a fellow. I've been a poor sort of skunk; I know that better than anyone—but I'll make good now—and if the Colonel himself tries to take my chance away from me I'll brain him. See?"

She saw very imperfectly, but she nodded, and her eyes were blind with tears.

And Alfred Tinker kissed her toil-roughened hand like a gallant knight of old and fled.

IX

ALFRED TINKER had just completed his arrangements when the Adjutant, in full war-kit, with a brown paper parcel under his arm, banged into the tailoring department at the Mairie. He was preoccupied, and beyond the fact that a light burned unusually late over the work-table and that someone stood in the shadow in apparent idleness, the circumstances at first made no particular impression on him.

"The riding breeches," he explained briefly. "New leathers. Better be getting on with them. A nice quiet job for you, Tinker. And, look here, there's this blessed tunic that Peters made for me. I don't know whether you can do anything to it. Have a try anyhow; there's a good fellow. It's awful, and I shall want it when I come out. Bound to get fearfully messed up in the best of cases."

The expected "Yes, sir," failed, and the Adjutant looked up. He saw then an Alfred Tinker whom he hardly recognised—a small, warlike figure, muffled to the eyes in a greatcoat, a haversack on its shoulders, a rifle in its hand. For a moment the two men stared at each other in grim silence. Then the Adjutant laughed. "What on earth do you think you're up to, Tinker?" he asked. "Play-acting?"

"I'm going with you, sir," was the reply.

"Oh, no, you're not. Don't be a silly ass. You're a good man where you are. You'd be a nuisance anywhere else. Besides, I want these breeches done."

"For God's sake, let me come with you, sir!"

"I can't. It's not my business anyhow. You've got your job. You stick to it and be thankful."

"You mustn't stop me, sir," said Alfred Tinker in a stifled voice of hysterical despair, "it's—it's ruining my life, sir—you mustn't do it. After all I'm a man, sir, even if I am a damned tailor—I must go. I 'listed for a soldier, and I'm going to be a soldier. I don't care if I'm shot for it. Every one's been against me—right from the very first—but I've had enough this time. I'm off—and no one's going to stop me either——"

Now, men going into action are subject to various moods. Some are jocular, some irritable, some strung up to snapping points, some merely apathetic. The Adjutant's mood at that moment was one of peevish obtuseness. He saw nothing of the tragedy which underlay this extraordinary burst of insubordination, and the insubordination itself hardly affected him. He could only think of his breeches. For a moment their fate overshadowed the whole war. He tapped his revolver significantly.

"You've been drinking, Tinker," he said. "It's disgraceful—almost in the face of the enemy, too. You really ought to be shot for it. You are a soldier, and if you disobey orders I shall have you arrested—though I must say it would be a damned nuisance. Your orders are to stay here and put in these leathers. You understand—you stay here whatever happens. Got that clear?"

The habit of obedience is a poisonous one. It rots the soul. To his own horror and shame Alfred Tinker answered "Yes, sir," and the butt end of his rifle struck the floor in dull surrender. The Adjutant nodded, not unkindly.

"Better get to bed and sleep it off," he said. "You'll make no end of a mess of those breeches if you don't."

He went off, slamming the door, and Alfred Tinker heard him clatter heavily down the wooden stairs. He heard, too, the sharp word of command and the muffled rhythmic tread of the Redmonthshires as they set off through the black night in search of glory.

And he prepared to shoot himself. He had made up his mind to shoot himself. But then his eye caught sight of the Adjutant's tunic spread out in all its shameful imperfection. He perceived the remedy. Art waged war against despair and triumphed. Very well. He would do his duty as a tailor and a soldier to the end. And his last work should be a masterpiece.

With tears of rage and grief running down his cheeks, Alfred Tinker took up the scissors.

X

IT began shortly after one o'clock. Alfred had just nipped off the Adjutant's sleeve. It was gunfire, but it was not familiar. It came from a new direction and it sounded

close at hand and very menacing. Alfred stopped in his work to listen to it. He then perceived other sounds. At one bound the little town seemed to have leapt to its feet. People who had been sleeping five minutes before were running down the street, shouting to one another.

Alfred filled his mouth with pins. The war had no further interest for him. It had rejected him. To all intents and purposes he was a ghost clearing up the affairs of a former existence, and he did not even look up when a red-faced, much flustered Y.M.C.A. worker burst in upon him with a series of gasping exclamations.

" The Germans—flank attack—broken through—here in half an hour—whole town to be evacuated—we're getting the W.A.A.C.'s out now—no time to lose—come on lend a hand, for God's sake.

Alfred removed the pins.

" Sorry," he said. " I'm a non-combatant." The Y.M.C.A. official gaped.

" What—in uniform ! "

" Yes, it is a bit confusing," Alfred admitted. He stood in an attitude of reflection, holding on to his tape-measure as a curate holds to the two ends of his stole. " I find it confusing myself," he added with withering sarcasm. " I'm a civilian under military orders. I'm not to fight. Oh dear, no, certainly not—but I've got to do as I'm told. And I'm under orders to finish this tunic. I'm to stay here whatever happens. You see how it is——"

" You're mad ! "

" Of course, I'm mad," said Alfred bitterly. " Everyone who joins the blinkin' British Army's mad. Didn't you know that ? "

" I s'ppose you're a spy, then," said the Y.M.C.A. man tauntingly, " waiting for your friends."

Alfred remained unruffled.

" I don't know," he said. " Never had any orders on the subject. Don't know what I am. But I'll be shot if I don't finish this tunic——"

" What's the good of the tunic if the Germans get it ? "

" Don't know. Never had any orders ——"

" Oh, come on, for Heaven's sake, man ! "

" Do you want to make me a deserter ? " Alfred demanded, waving his scissors indignantly. " Get out ! " On second thoughts, however, he followed his would-be rescuer to the top of the stairs. " You look after the W.A.A.C.'s," he shouted, " especially the one with the curly hair."

Then he went back and shut the door.

A man who is done with life is like a general. He stands on a prominence in absolute security and can take a calm, bird's-eye view of the whole situation. Alfred Tinker whistled to himself as he worked. Beyond two blazing spots of colour in either cheek and occasional outbursts of muttered taunts addressed, apparently, to the world in general, he showed no signs of excitement or hurry. But there was so much method in his procedure that he really worked with incredible swiftness. The rolls of khaki blocked the one window as effectively as sandbags. The dusty bureaux and cupboards, in which resided the archives of the little town, made an admirable bullet-proof barricade for the door and staircase head. Alfred pushed and heaved them into position with a maniac's strength. Their heaviness and resistance raised a Berserk fury in him. They might have been his personal enemies. He kicked them. When their resistance was broken he gibed at them.

" Aha, you would, would you ? Thought you'd done me, did you ? Thought I'd stay a damn little tailor all my life, eh ? You and your bloomin' orders. I'll show you the sort of chap I am——"

In a quarter of an hour the tailoring department in the Mairie had been transformed into a veritable fortress. By this time the sharper music of rifle-firing had begun to play a staccato accompaniment to the rumble of the guns. Through an aperture in his defences Alfred made his way downstairs into the street. The dawn had broken. Fugitives and stragglers stumbled past like ghosts. For the most part they were wounded but they were above all things leaderless, disheartened, too bewildered to know even where they were going or what had happened. The avalanche had fallen on a section where the French and British armies met. French and English jostled each other.

Alfred Tinker stood on the steps of the Mairie and yelled at them. He was like a showman at a fair—like a cheap-jack selling his wares.

" Now, then, gentlemen, walk up, walk up ! Entrance free ! No charges ! Anyone wanting another pot at the Hun step this way ! Anyone with guts in him come and look at General Tinker's famous shooting

range! All for nothing! You can fire till you drop! For to-day only! Walk up! Walk up!"

He danced, he gyrated. He waved his arms. He was possessed, he was irresistible—a dynamic force conscious of no limitations. His supreme joyousness was a prairie fire seizing upon everything that came within its reach. The Frenchmen, who could not understand a word he said, stopped at first to laugh, then to cheer. The English answered to a man. The dogged soul in them that loathed retreat seized avariciously on the frail chance that this strange Cockney apparition offered them. They caught the joke of it all. Laughing, jesting, drunk with the sudden revulsion of feeling, they poured up the steps of the Mairie—as many as their new commander asked for. The rest, no longer stragglers, but men imbued with grim purpose, hurried on to join whatever force was coming to the rescue.

All this passed between three o'clock and three-thirty. At three-thirty-five the town was deserted, the Mairie, with unguarded doors, stood wrapped in desolate silence. At four o'clock the German advance guards entered the Market Place. They, too, were perhaps intoxicated with their own swift success. At any rate, their hurried inspection betrayed nothing suspicious. They continued their pursuit of the broken enemy, whilst the main body of their forces, with a car load of be-ribboned officers, took formal possession of the conquered town. It was not until the staff, spur-jingling and arrogantly assured, entered the Mairie and stood in the empty hall issuing their orders that something happened.

The advance guards heard it, and they knew at once what it signified. The retreat had been a feint—a trap. The treacherous English had fallen mysteriously in their rear. They faltered—finally fell back precipitately on the town, which offered a spectacle of incredible tumult. The Market Place had become a battlefield in which one man fought panic-stricken against another. The twilight added to the confusion. It took the raging, blaspheming officers twenty minutes to regain their mastery and organise the siege of the stronghold, which had blazed up in their very midst. The siege itself was short and terrible. But the twenty minutes had been fatal. Just as the last line of defence had broken down, the British and French reinforcements counter-attacked, sweeping all before them.

The hall and staircase of the Mairie were a shambles. The victors had much ado to make their way over the hideous mêlée of broken bodies and broken furniture to the remnants of the little garrison. They found Alfred Tinker lying face downwards across a table on which the Adjutant's tunic still waited completion. In one hand he clutched his scissors. Either he had seized upon them as a last available weapon or in the gathering night had returned instinctively to his natural profession.

As they lifted him his eyes opened an instant.

The man who had held him described his expression afterwards as one of unearthly happiness.

"Tinker—tailor——" he said very faintly, "soldier——"

And passed into merciful unconsciousness.

XI

MR. ALFRED TINKER has gone back to Solomon's. He has now thirty assistants under him who worship the ground he walks on. For a tailor who is at once a genius and a V.C. with five bayonet scars on his body is a leader to be proud of.

And, of course, everyone who cares for his personal appearance and a chat about the old fighting days, goes to Solomon's.

Mr. Samuel Solomon has moved his private residence from Pimlico to Mayfair. Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Tinker (*née* Edwards), whose tastes are of a less ostentatious nature, have a house in Hampstead.

It is understood that they are ridiculously happy.

The Stranger

She had no other than a woman's reason

By KATHERINE MANSFIELD

IT seemed to the little crowd on the wharf that she was never going to move again. There she lay, immense, motionless on the grey, crinkled water, a loop of smoke above her, an immense flock of gulls screaming and diving after the galley droppings at the stern. You could just see little couples parading—little flies walking up and down the dish on the grey, crinkled tablecloth. Other flies clustered and swarmed at the edge. Now there was a gleam of white on the lower deck—the cook's apron or the stewardess perhaps. Now a tiny black spider raced up the ladder on to the bridge.

In the front of the crowd, a strong-looking, middle-aged man, dressed very well, very snugly in a grey overcoat, grey silk scarf, thick gloves and dark felt hat, marched up and down, twirling his folded umbrella. He seemed to be the leader of the little crowd on the wharf and at the same time to keep them together. He was something between the sheepdog and the shepherd.

But what a fool—what a fool he had been not to bring any glasses! There wasn't a pair of glasses between the whole lot of them.

"Curious thing, Mr. Scott, that none of us have thought of glasses. We might have been able to stir 'em up a bit. We might have managed a little signalling. 'Don't hesitate to land. Natives harmless.' Or: 'A welcome awaits you. All is forgiven.' What? Eh?"

Mr. Hammond's quick, eager glance, so nervous and yet so friendly and confiding, took in everything on the wharf, roped in even those old chaps lounging against the gangways. They knew, every man jack of them, that Mrs. Hammond was on that boat, and he was so tremendously excited it never entered his head not to believe that this marvellous fact meant something to them, too. It warmed his heart toward them. They were, he decided, as decent a crowd of people—— Those old chaps over by the gangways, too—fine, solid old chaps. What chests—by Jove! And he squared his own, plunged his thick-gloved hands into his pockets, rocked from heel to toe.

"Yes, my wife's been in Europe for the last ten months. On a visit to our eldest girl, who was married last year. I brought her up here, as far as Salisbury, myself. So I thought I'd better come and fetch her back. Yes, yes, yes." The shrewd grey eyes narrowed again and searched anxiously, quickly, the motionless liner. Again his overcoat was unbuttoned. Out came the thin, butter-yellow watch again, and for the twentieth—fiftieth—hundredth time he made the calculation.

"Let me see, now. It was two-fifteen when the doctor's launch went off. Two-fifteen. It is now exactly twenty-eight minutes past four. That is to say, the doctor's been gone two hours and thirteen minutes. Two hours and thirteen minutes! Whee-ooh!" He gave a queer little half whistle and snapped his watch to again. "But I think we should have been told if there was anything up—don't you, Mr. Gaven?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Hammond. I don't think there's anything to—anything to worry about," said Mr. Gaven, knocking out his pipe against the heel of his shoe. "At the same time——"

"Quite so! Quite so!" cried Mr. Hammond. "Dashed annoying!" He paced quickly up and down and came back again to his stand between Mr. and Mrs. Scott and Mr. Gaven. "It's getting quite dark, too," and he waved his folded umbrella as though the dusk at least might have had the decency to keep off for a bit. But the dusk came slowly, spreading like a slow stain over the water. Little Jean Scott dragged at her mother's hand.

"I wan' my tea, mammy!" she wailed.

"I expect you do," said Mr. Hammond. "I expect all these ladies want their tea."

And his kind, flushed, almost pitiful glance roped them all in again. He wondered whether Janey was having a final cup of tea in the saloon out there. He hoped so; he thought not. It would be just like her not to leave the deck. In that case perhaps the deck steward would bring her up a cup. If he'd been there, he'd have got it for her—somehow. And for a moment he was on deck, standing over her, watching her little hand fold round the cup in the way she had, while she drank the only cup of tea to be got on board. But now he was back here, and the Lord only knew when that cursed captain would stop hanging about in the stream. He took another turn up and down, up and down. He walked as far as the cab stand to make sure his driver hadn't disappeared; back he swerved again to the little flock huddled in the shelter of the banana crates. Little Jean Scott was still wanting her tea. Poor little beggar! He wished he had a bit of chocolate on him.

"Here, Jean!" he said. "Like a lift up?" And easily, gently, he swung the little girl on to a higher barrel. The movement of holding her, steadying her, relieved him wonderfully, lightened his heart.

"Hold on," he said, keeping an arm round her.

"Oh, don't worry about *Jean*, Mr. Hammond!" said Mrs. Scott.

"That's all right, Mrs. Scott. No trouble. It's a pleasure. Jean's a little pal of mine, aren't you, Jean?"

"Yes, Mr. Hammond," said Jean, and she ran her finger down the dent of his felt hat.

But suddenly she caught him by the ear and gave a loud scream. "Lo-ok, Mr. Hammond! She's moving! Look, she's coming in!"

By Jove! So she was. At last! She was slowly, slowly turning round. A bell sounded far over the water and a great spout of steam gushed into the air. The gulls rose; they fluttered away like bits of white paper. And whether that deep throbbing was her engines or his heart, Mr. Hammond couldn't say. He had to nerve himself to bear it, whatever it was. At that moment old Captain Johnson, the harbour master, came striding down the wharf, a leather portfolio under his arm.

"Jean'll be all right," said Mr. Scott. "I'll hold her." He was just in time. Mr. Hammond had forgotten about Jean. He sprang away to greet old Captain Johnson.

"Well, Captain"—the eager, nervous voice rang out again—"you've taken pity on us at last."

"It's no good blaming me, Mr. Hammond," wheezed old Captain Johnson, staring at the liner. "You've got Mrs. Hammond on board, ain't yer?"

"Yes, yes!" said Hammond, and he kept by the harbour master's side. "Mrs. Hammond's there. Hul-lo! We shan't be long now!"

With her telephone ring-ringing, the thrum of her screw filling the air, the big liner bore down on them, cutting sharp through the dark water so that big white shavings curled to either side. Hammond and the harbour master kept in front of the rest. Hammond took off his hat; he raked the decks—they were crammed with passengers; he waved his hat and bawled a loud, strange "Hul-lo!" across the water; and then turned round and burst out laughing and said something—nothing—to old Captain Johnson.

"Seen her?" asked the harbour master.

"No, not yet. Steady—wait a bit!" And suddenly, between two great clumsy idiots—"Get out of the way there!" he signed with his umbrella—he saw a hand raised—a white glove shaking a handkerchief. Another moment and—thank God, thank God!—there she was. There was Janey. There was Mrs. Hammond, yes, yes, yes—standing by the rail and smiling and nodding and waving her handkerchief.

"Well, that's first-class — first-class! Well, well, well!" He positively stamped. Like lightning he drew out his cigar case and offered it to old Captain Johnson. "Have a cigar, captain! They're pretty good. Have a couple! Here"—and he pressed all the cigars in the case on the harbour master.

"Thanks, Mr. Hammond!" wheezed old Captain Johnson.

Hammond stuffed the cigar case back. His hands were shaking, but he'd got hold of himself again. He was able to face Janey. There she was, leaning on the rail, talking to some woman and at the same time watching him, ready for him. It struck him, as the gulf of water closed, how small she looked on that huge ship. His heart was wrung with such a spasm that he could have cried out. How little she looked to have

come all that long way and back by herself! Just like her, though. She had the courage of a—— And now the crew had come forward and parted the passengers; they had lowered the rails for the gangways.

The voices on shore and the voices on board flew to greet each other.

"All well?"

"All well."

"How's mother?"

"Much better."

"Hullo, Jean!"

"Hillo, Aun' Emily!"

"Had a good voyage?"

"Splendid!"

"Shan't be long now!"

"Not long now."

The engines stopped. Slowly she edged to the wharf-side.

"Make way, there—make way—make way!" And the wharf hands brought the heavy gangways along at a sweeping run. Hammond signed to Janey to stay where she was. The old harbour master stepped forward; he followed. As to "ladies first," or any rot like that, it never entered his head.

"After you, captain!" he cried genially. And, treading on the old man's heels, he strode up the gangway on to the deck in a bee-line to Janey, and Janey was clasped in his arms.

"Well, well, well! Yes, yes! Here we are at last!" he stammered. It was all he could say. And Janey emerged and her cool little voice—the only voice in the world for him—said:

"Well, darling! Have you been waiting long?"

"No; not long. Or, at any rate, it didn't matter. It was over now. But the point was, he had a cab waiting at the end of the wharf. Was she ready to go off? Was her luggage ready? In that case they could cut off sharp with her cabin luggage and let the rest go hang until to-morrow. He bent over her and she looked up with her familiar half-smile. She was just the same. Not a day changed. She laid her small hand on his sleeve.

"How are the children, John?" she asked.

Hang the children!

"Perfectly well. Never better in their lives."

"Haven't they sent me letters?"

"Yes, yes—of course! I've left them at the hotel for you to digest later on."

"We can't go quite so fast," said she. "I've got people to say good-bye to—and then there's the captain." As his face fell she gave his arm a small understanding squeeze. "If the captain comes off the bridge I want you to thank him for having looked after your wife so beautifully."

Well, he'd got her. If she wanted another ten minutes—— As he gave way she was surrounded. The whole first-class seemed to want to say good-bye to Janey.

"Good-bye, *dear* Mrs. Hammond! And next time you're in Sydney I'll *expect* you."

"Darling Mrs. Hammond! You won't forget to write me, will you?"

"Well, Mrs. Hammond, what this boat would have been without you!"

It was as plain as a pikestaff that she was by far the most popular woman on board. And she took it all—just as usual. Absolutely composed. Just her little self—just Janey all over; standing there with her veil thrown back. Hammond never noticed what his wife had on. It was all the same to him whatever she wore. But to-day he did notice that she wore a black "costume"—didn't they call it?—with white frills, trimmings he supposed they were, at the neck and sleeves. All this while Janey handed him round.

"John, dear!" And then "I want to introduce you to——"

Finally they did escape, and she led the way to her stateroom. To follow Janey down the passage that she knew so well—that was so strange to him; to part the green curtains after her and to step into the cabin that had been hers gave him exquisite happiness. But—confound it—the stewardess was there, strapping up the rugs.

"That's the last, Mrs. Hammond," said the stewardess, rising and pulling down her cuffs.

He was introduced again, and then Janey and the stewardess disappeared into the passage. He heard whisperings. She was getting the tipping business over, he supposed. He sat down on the striped sofa and took his hat off. There were the rugs she had taken with her; they looked good as new. All her luggage looked fresh, perfect. The labels were written in her beautiful little clear hand—"Mrs. John Hammond!"

"Mrs. John Hammond!" He gave a long sigh of content and leaned back, crossing his arms. The strain was over. He felt he could have sat there for ever

sighing his relief—the relief at being rid of that horrible tug, pull, grip on his heart. The danger was over. That was the feeling. They were on dry land again.

But at that moment Janey's head came round the corner.

"Darling, do you mind? I just want to go and say good-bye to the doctor."

Hammond started up. "I'll come with you."

"No, no!" she said. "Don't bother. I'd rather not. I'll not be a minute."

And before he could answer she was gone.

Would she really not be long? What was the time now? Out came the watch; he stared at nothing. That was rather queer of Janey, wasn't it? Why couldn't she have told the stewardess to say good-bye for her? Why did she have to go chasing after the ship's doctor? She could have sent a note from the hotel even if the affair had been urgent. Urgent? Did it—could it mean that she had been ill on the voyage—she was keeping something from him? That was it! He seized his hat. He was going off to find that fellow and to wring the truth out of him at all costs. He thought he'd noticed just something. She was just a touch too calm—too steady.

The curtains rang. Janey was back. He jumped to his feet.

"Janey, have you been ill on this voyage? You have!"

"Ill?" Her airy little voice mocked him. She stepped over the rugs and came up close, touched his breast, and looked up at him.

"Darling," she said, "don't frighten me. Of course I haven't! Whatever makes you think I have? Do I look ill?"

But Hammond didn't see her. He only felt that she was looking at him and that there was no need to worry about anything. She was here to look after things. It was all right. Everything was.

The gentle pressure of her hand was so calming that he put his over hers to hold it there. And she said:

"Stand still. I want to look at you. I haven't seen you yet. You've had your beard beautifully trimmed, and you look—younger, I think, and decidedly thinner! Bachelor life agrees with you."

"Agrees with me!" He groaned for love and caught her close again. And again, as always, he had the feeling he was holding something that never was quite his—his. Something too delicate, too precious, that would fly away once he let go.

"For God's sake let's get off to the hotel so that we can be by ourselves!" And he rang the bell hard for someone to look sharp with the luggage.

¶

WALKING down the wharf together she took his arm. He had her on his arm again. And the difference it made to get into the cab after Janey—to throw the red-and-yellow striped blanket round them both—to tell the driver to hurry because neither of them had had any tea. No more going without his tea or pouring out his own. She was back. He turned to her, squeezed her hand, and said gently, teasingly, in the "special" voice he had for her: "Glad to be home again, dearie?" She smiled; she didn't even bother to answer, but gently she drew his hand away as they came to the brighter streets.

"We've got the best room in the hotel," he said. "I wouldn't be put off with another. And I asked the chambermaid to put in a bit of a fire in case you felt chilly. She's a nice, attentive girl. And I thought now we were here we wouldn't bother to go home to-morrow, but spend the day looking round and leave the morning after. Does that suit you? There's no hurry, is there? The children will have you soon enough. I thought a day's sight-seeing might make a nice break in your journey—eh, Janey?"

"Have you taken the tickets for the day after?" she asked.

"I should think I have!" He unbuttoned his overcoat and took out his bulging pocket book. "Here we are! I reserved a first-class carriage to Cooktown. There it is—'Mr. *and* Mrs. John Hammond.' I thought we might as well do ourselves comfortably, and we don't want other people butting in, do we? But if you'd like to stop here a bit longer——"

"Oh, no!" said Janey quickly. "Not for the world! The day after to-morrow, then. And the children——"

But they had reached the hotel. The manager was standing in the broad, brilliantly-lighted porch. He came down to greet them. A porter ran from the hall for their boxes.

"Well, Mr. Arnold, here's Mrs. Hammond at last!"

The manager led them through the hall himself and pressed the elevator bell. Hammond knew there were business pals of his sitting at the little hall tables having a drink before dinner. But he wasn't going to risk interruption ; he looked neither to the right nor the left. They could think what they pleased. If they didn't understand, the more fools they—and he stepped out of the lift, unlocked the door of their room, and shepherded Janey in. The door shut. Now, at last, they were alone together. He turned up the light.

But—would you believe it !—again they were interrupted. This time it was the porter with the luggage. He made two journeys of it, leaving the door open in between, taking his time, whistling through his teeth in the corridor. Hammond paced up and down the room, tearing off his gloves tearing off his scarf. Finally he flung his overcoat on to the bedside.

At last the fool was gone. The door clicked. Now they *were* alone. Said Hammond : " I feel I'll never have you to myself again. These cursed people ! Janey "—he bent his flushed, eager gaze upon her—" let's have dinner up here. If we go down to the restaurant we'll be interrupted, and then there's the confounded music "—the music he'd praised so highly, applauded so loudly last night !—" we shan't be able to hear each other speak. Let's have something up here in front of the fire. It's too late for tea. I'll order a little supper, shall I ? How does that idea strike you ? "

" Do, darling ! " said Janey. "And while you're away—the children's letters, please——"

" Oh, later on will do ! " said Hammond.

" But then we'd get it over," said Janey. "And I'd first have time to read——"

" Oh, I needn't go down ! " explained Hammond. " I'll just ring and give the order. You don't want to send me away, do you ? "

Janey shook her head and smiled.

" But you're thinking of something else. You're worrying about something," said Hammond. " What is it ? Come and sit on my knee before the fire."

" I'll just unpin my hat," said Janey, and she went over to the dressing table. "A-ah ! " She gave a little cry.

" What is it ? "

" Nothing, darling. I've just found the children's letters. That's all right. They will keep. No hurry now ! " She turned to him, clasping them. She tucked them into her frilled blouse. She cried quickly, gayly : " Oh, how typical this dressing table is of you ! "

" Why ? What's the matter with it ? " said Hammond.

" If it were floating in eternity, I should say ' John ! ' " laughed Janey, staring at the big bottle of hair tonic, the wicker bottle of eau-de-Cologne, the two hair brushes, and a dozen new collars tied with pink tape. " Is this all your luggage ? "

" Hang my luggage ! " said Hammond ; but all the same he liked being laughed at by Janey. " Let's talk. Let's get down to things. Tell me "—and as Janey perched on his knees he leaned back and drew her into the deep, ugly chair—" tell me you're really glad to be back, Janey."

" Yes, darling, I am glad," she said.

But just as when he embraced her he felt she would fly away, so Hammond never knew—never knew for dead certain that she was as glad as he was. How could he know ? Would he ever know ? Would he always have this craving—this pang like hunger, somehow, to make Janey so much part of him that there wasn't any of her to escape ? He wanted to blot out everybody, everything. He wished now he'd turned off the light. That might have brought her nearer. And now those letters from the children rustled in her blouse. He could have chucked them into the fire.

" Janey," he whispered.

" Yes, dear ? " She lay on his breast, but so lightly, so remotely. Their breathing rose and fell together.

" Janey ! "

" What is it ? "

" Turn to me," he whispered. A slow, deep flush flowed into his forehead. " Kiss me, Janey ! You kiss me ! "

It seemed to him there was a tiny pause—but long enough for him to suffer torture—before her lips touched his, firmly, lightly—kissing them as she always kissed him, as though the kiss—how could he describe it ?—confirmed what they were saying, signed the contract. But that wasn't what he wanted ; that wasn't at all what he thirsted for. He felt suddenly, horribly tired.

" If you knew," he said, opening his eyes, " what it's been like—waiting to-day. I thought the boat would never come in. There we were, hanging about. What kept you so long ? "

She made no answer. She was looking away from him at the fire. The flames hurried—hurried over the coals, flickered, fell.

"Not asleep, are you?" said Hammond, and he jumped her up and down.

"No," she said. And then: "Don't do that, dear. No, I was thinking. As a matter of fact," she said, "one of the passengers died last night—a man. That's what held us up. We brought him in—I mean, he wasn't buried at sea. So, of course, the ship's doctor and the shore doctor——"

"What was it?" asked Hammond uneasily. He hated to hear of death. He hated this to have happened. It was, in some queer way, as though he and Janey had met a funeral on their way to the hotel.

"Oh, it wasn't anything in the least infectious!' said Janey. She was speaking scarcely above her breath. "It was *heart*." A pause. "Poor fellow!" she said. "Quite young." And she watched the fire flicker and fall. "He died in my arms," said Janey.

The blow was so sudden that Hammond thought he would faint. He couldn't move; he couldn't breathe. He felt all his strength flowing—flowing into the big, dark chair, and the big, dark chair held him fast, gripped him, forced him to bear it.

"What?" he said dully. "What's that you say?"

"The end was quite peaceful," said the small voice. "He just"—and Hammond saw her lift her gentle hand—"breathed his life away at the end." And her hand fell.

"Who—else was there?" Hammond managed to ask.

"Nobody. I was alone with him."

Ah, my God, what was she saying! What was she doing to him! This would kill him! And all the while she spoke:

"I saw the change coming and I sent the steward for the doctor, but the doctor was too late. He couldn't have done anything, anyway."

"But—why *you*, why *you?*" moaned Hammond.

At that Janey turned quickly, quickly searched his face.

"You don't *mind*, John, do you?" she asked. "You don t—— It's nothing to do with you and me."

Somehow or other he managed to shake some sort of a smile at her. Somehow or other he stammered: "No—go—on, go on! I want you to tell me."

"But, John, darling——"

"Tell me, Janey!"

"There's nothing to tell," she said, wondering. "He was one of the first-class passengers. I saw he was very ill when he came on board. But he seemed to be so much better until yesterday. He had a severe attack in the afternoon—excitement—nervousness, I think, about arriving. And after that he never recovered."

"But why didn't the stewardess——"

"Oh, my dear—the stewardess!" said Janey. "What would he have felt? And besides, he might have wanted to leave a message—to——"

"Didn't he?" muttered Hammond. "Didn't he say anything?"

"No, darling, not a word!" She shook her head softly. "All the time I was with him he was too weak—he was too weak even to move a finger."

Janey was silent. But her words, so light, so soft, so chill, seemed to hover in the air, to rain into his breast like snow.

The fire had gone red. Now it fell in with a sharp sound and the room was colder. Cold crept up his arms. The room was huge, immense, glittering. It filled his whole world. There was the great blind bed, with his coat flung across it like some headless man saying his prayers. There was the luggage, ready to be carried away again, anywhere, tossed into trains, carted on to boats.

"He was too weak. He was too weak to move a finger." And yet he died in Janey's arms. She—who'd never—never once in all these years—never on one single solitary occasion——

No, he mustn't think of it. Madness lay in thinking of it. No, he wouldn't face it. He couldn't stand it. It was too much to bear!

And now Janey touched his tie with her fingers. She pinched the edges of the tie together.

"You're not—sorry I told you, John, darling? It hasn't made you sad? It hasn't spoilt our evening—our being alone together?"

But at that he had to hide his face. He put his face into her bosom and his arms enfolded her.

Spoilt their evening! Spoilt their being alone together! They would never be alone together again.

The Brute

A terrible record—and a reckoning

By JOSEPH CONRAD

DODGING in from the rain-swept street, I exchanged a smile and a glance with Miss Blank in the bar of the Three Crows. This exchange was effected with extreme propriety. It is a shock to think that, if still alive, Miss Blank must be something over sixty now. How time passes!

Noticing my gaze directed inquiringly at the partition of glass and varnished wood, Miss Blank was good enough to say, encouragingly:

"Only Mr. Jermyn and Mr. Stonor in the parlour, with another gentleman I've never seen before."

I moved towards the parlour door. A voice discoursing on the other side (it was but a matchboard partition) rose so loudly that the concluding words became quite plain in all their atrocity.

"That fellow, Wilmot, fairly dashed her brains out, and a good job, too!"

This inhuman sentiment, since there was nothing profane or improper in it, failed to do as much as to check the slight yawn Miss Blank was achieving behind her hand. And she remained gazing fixedly at the window-panes, which streamed with rain.

As I opened the parlour door the same voice went on in the same cruel strain:

"I was glad when I heard she got the knock from somebody at last. Sorry enough for poor Wilmot, though. That man and I used to be chums at one time. Of course, that was the end of him. A clear case if there ever was one. No way out of it. None at all."

The voice belonged to the gentleman Miss Blank had never seen before. He straddled his long legs on the hearthrug. Jermyn, leaning forward, held his pocket handkerchief spread out before the grate. He looked back dismally over his shoulder and, as I slipped behind one of the little wooden tables, I nodded to him. On the other side of the fire, imposingly calm and large, sat Mr. Stonor, jammed tight into a capacious Windsor arm-chair. There was nothing small about him but his short, white side-whiskers. Yards and yards of extra superfine blue cloth (made up into an overcoat) reposed on a chair by his side. And he must just have brought some liner from sea, because another chair was smothered under his black waterproof, ample as a pall, and made of three-fold oiled silk, double-stitched throughout. A man's handbag of the usual size looked like a child's toy on the floor near his feet.

I did not nod to him. He was too big to be nodded to in that parlour. He was a senior Trinity pilot and condescended to take his turn in the cutter only during the summer months. He had been many times in charge of royal yachts in and out of Port Victoria. Besides, it's no use nodding to a monument. And he was like one. He didn't speak, he didn't budge. He just sat there, holding his handsome old head up, immovable, and almost bigger than life. It was extremely fine. Mr. Stonor's presence reduced old Jermyn to a mere shabby wisp of a man and made the talkative stranger in tweeds on the hearthrug look absurdly boyish. The latter must have been a few years over thirty and was certainly not the sort of individual that gets abashed at the sound of his own voice, because gathering me in, as it were, by a friendly glance, he kept it going without a check.

"I was glad of it," he repeated emphatically. "You may be surprised at it, but then you haven't gone through the experience I've had of her. I can tell you, it was something to remember. Of course, I got off scot free myself—as you can see. She did her best to break up my pluck for me tho'. She jolly near drove as fine a fellow as ever lived into a madhouse. What do you say to that—eh?"

Not an eyelid twitched in Mr. Stonor's enormous face. Monumental! The speaker looked straight into my eyes.

" It used to make me sick to think of her going about the world murdering people."

Jermyn approached the handkerchief a little nearer to the grate and groaned. It was simply a habit he had.

" I've seen her once," he declared, with mournful indifference. " She had a house——"

The stranger in tweeds turned to stare down at him, surprised.

" She had three houses," he corrected authoritatively. But Jermyn was not to be contradicted.

" She had a house, I say," he repeated, with dismal obstinacy. " A great, big, ugly, white thing. You could see it from miles away—sticking up."

" So you could," assented the other readily. " It was old Colchester's notion, though he was always threatening to give her up. He couldn't stand her racket any more, he declared; it was too much of a good thing for him; he would wash his hands of her, if he never got hold of another—and so on. I dare say he would have chucked her, only—it may surprise you—his missus wouldn't hear of it. Funny, eh? But with women, you never know how they will take a thing, and Mrs. Colchester, with her moustaches and big eyebrows, set up for being as strong-minded as they make them. She used to walk about in a brown silk dress, with a great gold cable flopping about her bosom. You should have heard her snapping out: 'Rubbish!' or 'Stuff and nonsense!' I dare say she knew when she was well off. They had no children and had never set up a home anywhere. When in England, she just made shift to hang out anyhow in some cheap hotel or boarding-house. I dare say she liked to get back to the comforts she was used to. She knew very well she couldn't gain by any change. And, moreover, Colchester, though a first-rate man, was not what you may call in his first youth and, perhaps, she may have thought that he wouldn't be able to get hold of another (as he used to say) so easily. Anyhow, for one reason or another, it was 'Rubbish' and 'Stuff and nonsense' for the good lady. I overheard once young Mr. Apse himself say to her confidentially: " I assure you, Mrs. Colchester, I am beginning to feel quite unhappy about the name she's getting for herself.' 'Oh,' says she, with her deep little hoarse laugh, 'if one took notice of all the silly talk,' and she showed Apse all her ugly false teeth at once. 'It would take more than that to make me lose my confidence in her, I assure you,' says she."

At this point, without any change of facial expression, Mr. Stonor emitted a short sardonic laugh. It was very impressive, but I didn't see the fun. I looked from one to another. The stranger on the hearthrug had an ugly smile.

" And Mr. Apse shook both Mrs. Colchester's hands, he was so pleased to hear a good word said for their favourite. All these Apses, young and old you know, were perfectly infatuated with that abominable, dangerous——"

" I beg your pardon," I interrupted, for he seemed to be addressing himself exclusively to me, " but who on earth are you talking about? "

" I am talking of the Apse family," he answered, courteously.

I nearly let out a damn at this. But just then the respected Miss Blank put her head in and said that the cab was at the door, if Mr. Stonor wanted to catch the eleven-three up.

¶

AT once the senior pilot arose in his mighty bulk and began to struggle into his coat, with awe-inspiring upheavals. The stranger and I hurried impulsively to his assistance, and directly we laid our hands on him he became perfectly quiescent. We had to raise our arms very high and to make efforts. It was like caparisoning a docile elephant. With a " Thanks, gentlemen," he dived under and squeezed himself through the door in a great hurry.

We smiled at each other in a friendly way.

" I wonder how he manages to hoist himself up a ship's side-ladder," said the man in tweeds; and poor Jermyn, who was a mere North Sea pilot, without official status or recognition of any sort, pilot only by courtesy, groaned.

" He makes eight hundred a year."

" Are you a sailor? " I asked the stranger.

" I used to be till a couple of years ago, when I got married," answered this communicative individual. " I even went to sea first in that very ship we were speaking of when you came in."

" What ship? " I asked, puzzled. " I never heard you mention a ship."

"I've just told you her name, my dear sir," he replied. "The *Apse Family*. Surely you've heard of the great firm of Apse and Sons, shipowners. They had a pretty big fleet. There was the *Lucy Apse*, and the *Harold Apse*, and *Anne*, *John*, *Malcolm*, *Clara*, *Juliet*, and so on—no end of *Apses*. Every brother, sister, aunt, cousin, wife—and grandmother, too, for all I know—of the firm had a ship named after them. Good, solid, old-fashioned craft they were, too, built to carry and to last. None of your new-fangled, labour-saving appliances in them, but plenty of men and plenty of good salt beef and hard tack put aboard—and off you go to fight your way out and home again."

The miserable Jermyn made a sound of approval, which sounded like a groan of pain. Those were the ships for him. He pointed out in doleful tones that you couldn't say to labour-saving appliances: "Jump lively now, my hearties." No labour-saving appliance would go aloft on a dirty night with the sands under your lee.

"No," assented the stranger, with a wink at me. "The Apses didn't believe in them either, apparently. They treated their people well—as people don't get treated nowadays, and they were awfully proud of their ships. Nothing ever happened to them. This last one, the *Apse Family*, was to be like the others, only she was to be still stronger, still safer, still more roomy and comfortable. I believe they meant her to last for ever. They had her built composite—iron, teak-wood and greenheart, and her scantling was something fabulous. If ever an order was given for a ship in a spirit of pride, this one was. Everything of the best. The commodore captain of the employ was to command her, and they planned the accommodation for him like a house on shore under a big, tall poop that went nearly to the mainmast. No wonder Mrs. Colchester wouldn't let the old man give her up. Why, it was the best home she ever had in all her married days. She had a nerve, that woman.

"The fuss that was made while that ship was building! Let's have this a little stronger and that a little heavier; and hadn't that other thing better be changed for something a little thicker. The builders entered into the spirit of the game; and there she was, growing into the clumsiest, heaviest ship of her size right before all their eyes, without anybody becoming aware of it somehow. She was to be two thousand tons register, or a little over; no less on any account. But see what happens. When they came to measure her she turned out one thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine tons and a fraction. General consternation! And they say old Mr. Apse was so annoyed when they told him, that he took to his bed and died. The old gentleman had retired from the firm twenty-five years before and was ninety-six years old if a day, so his death wasn't, perhaps, so surprising. Still, Mr. Lucian Apse was convinced that his father would have lived to a hundred. So we may put him at the head of the list. Next comes the poor devil of a shipwright that brute caught and squashed as she went off the ways. They called it the launch of a ship, but I've heard people say that, from the wailing and yelling and scrambling out of the way, it was more like letting a devil loose upon the river. She snapped all her checks like pack-thread and went for the tugs in attendance like a fury. Before anybody could see what she was up to she sent one of them to the bottom and laid up another for three months' repairs. One of her cables parted, and then, suddenly—you couldn't tell why—she let herself be brought up with the other as quiet as a lamb.

"That's how she was. You could never be sure what she would be up to next. There are ships difficult to handle, but generally you can depend on them behaving rationally. With *that* ship, whatever you did with her, you never knew how it would end. She was a wicked beast. Or, perhaps, she was only just insane."

He uttered this supposition in so earnest a tone that I could not refrain from smiling. He left off biting his lower lip to apostrophise me.

"Eh! Why not? Why couldn't there be something in her build, in her lines corresponding to—What's madness? Only something just a tiny bit wrong in the make of your brain. Why shouldn't there be a mad ship—I mean mad in a ship-like way, so that under no circumstances could you be sure she would do what any other sensible ship would naturally do for you. There are ships that steer wildly and ships that can't be quite trusted always to stay; others want careful watching when running in a gale; and, again, there may be a ship that will make heavy weather of it in every little blow. But then you expect her to be

always so. You take it as part of her character, as a ship, just as you take account of a man's peculiarities of temper when you deal with him. But with her you couldn't. She was unaccountable. If she wasn't mad, then she was the most evil-minded, underhand, savage brute that ever went afloat. I've seen her run in a heavy gale beautifully for two days, and on the third broach to twice in the same afternoon. The first time she flung the helmsman clean over the wheel, but as she didn't quite manage to kill him she had another try about three hours afterwards. She swamped herself fore and aft, burst all the canvas we had set, scared all hands into a panic, and even frightened Mrs. Colchester down there in these beautiful stern cabins that she was so proud of. When we mustered the crew there was one man missing. Swept overboard, of course, without being either seen or heard, poor devil! And I only wonder more of us didn't go.

"Always something like that. Always. I heard an old mate tell Captain Colchester once that it had come to this with him, that he was afraid to open his mouth to give any sort of order. She was as much a terror in harbour as at sea. You could never be certain what would hold her. On the slightest provocation she would start snapping ropes, cables, wire hawsers, like carrots. She was heavy, clumsy, unhandy—but that does not quite explain that power for mischief she had. You know, somehow, when I think of her I can't help remembering what we hear of incurable lunatics breaking loose now and then."

He looked at me inquisitively. But, of course, I couldn't admit that a ship could be mad.

"In the ports where she was known," he went on, "they dreaded the sight of her. She thought nothing of knocking away twenty feet or so of solid stone facing off a quay or wiping off the end of a wooden wharf. She must have lost miles of chain and hundreds of tons of anchors in her time. When she fell aboard some poor unoffending ship it was the very devil of a job to haul her off again. And she never got hurt herself—just a few scratches or so, perhaps. They had wanted to have her strong. And so she was. Strong enough to ram Polar ice with. And as she began, so she went on. From the day she was launched she never let a year pass without murdering somebody. I think the owners got very worried about it. But they were a stiff-necked generation all these Apses; they wouldn't admit there could be anything wrong with the *Apse Family*. They wouldn't even change her name. 'Stuff and nonsense,' as Mrs. Colchester used to say. They ought at least to have shut her up for life in some dry dock or other, away up the river. I assure you, my dear sir, that she invariably did kill someone every voyage she made. She got a name for it, far and wide."

¶

I EXPRESSED my surprise that a ship with such a deadly reputation could ever get a crew.

"Then you don't know what sailors are, my dear sir. Let me just show you by an instance. One day in dock at home, while loafing on the forecastle head, I noticed two respectable salts come along, one a middle-aged, competent, steady man, evidently, the other a smart, youngish chap. They read the name on the bows and stopped to look at her. Says the elder man: '*Apse Family*. That's the sanguinary female dog' (I'm putting it in that way) 'of a ship, Jack, that kills a man every voyage. I wouldn't sign in her—not for Joe, I wouldn't.' And the other says: 'If she were mine, I'd have her towed on the mud and set on fire, blamme if I wouldn't.' Then the first man chimes in: 'Much do they care! Men are cheap, God knows.' The younger one spat in the water alongside. 'They won't have me—not for double wages.'

"They hung about for some time and then walked up the dock. Half an hour later I saw them both on our deck looking about for the mate and apparently very anxious to be taken on. And they were."

"How do you account for this?" I asked.

"What would you say?" he retorted. "Recklessness! The vanity of boasting in the evening to all their chums: 'We've just shipped in that there *Apse Family*. Blow her. She ain't going to scare us.' Sheer sailor-like perversity! A sort of curiosity. I put the question to them in the course of the voyage. The answer of the elderly chap was:

"'A man can die but once.' The younger assured me in a mocking tone that he wanted to see 'how she would do it this time.' But I tell you what; there was a sort of fascination about the brute."

Jermyn, who seemed to have seen every ship in the world, broke in sulkily:

"I saw her once out of this very window, towing up the river; a great black ugly thing, going along like a big hearse."

"Something sinister about her looks, wasn't there?" said the man in tweeds, looking down at old Jermyn with a friendly eye. "I always had a sort of horror of her. She gave me a beastly shock when I was no more than fourteen, the very first day—nay, hour—I joined her. Father came up to see me off, and was to go down to Gravesend with us. I was his second boy to go to sea. My big brother was already an officer then. We got on board about eleven in the morning and found the ship ready to drop out of the basin, stern first. She had not moved three times her own length when, at a little pluck the tug gave her to enter the dock gates, she made one of her rampaging starts and put such a weight on the check rope—a new six-inch hawser—that forward there they had no chance to ease it round in time, and it parted. I saw the broken end fly up high in the air, and the next moment that brute brought her quarter against the pier-head with a jar that staggered everybody about her decks. She didn't hurt herself. Not she! But one of the boys the mate had sent aloft on the mizzen to do something came down on the poop-deck—thump—right in front of me. He was not much older than myself. We had been grinning at each other only a few minutes before. He must have been handling himself carelessly, not expecting to get such a jerk. I heard his startled cry—Oh!—in a high treble as he felt himself going, and looked up in time to see him go limp all over as he fell. Ough! Poor father was remarkably white about the gills when we shook hands in Gravesend. 'Are you all right?' he says, looking hard at me. 'Yes, father.' 'Quite sure?' 'Yes, father.' 'Well, then, good-bye, my boy.' He told me afterwards that for half a word he would have carried me off home with him there and then. I am the baby of the family—you know," added the man in tweeds, stroking his moustache with an ingenuous smile.

I acknowledged this interesting communication by a sympathetic murmur. He waved his hand carelessly.

"This might have utterly spoiled a chap's nerve for going aloft, you know—utterly. He fell within two feet of me, cracking his head on a mooring-bitt. Never moved. Stone dead. Nice-looking little fellow, he was. I had just been thinking we would be great chums. However, that wasn't yet the worst that brute of a ship could do. I served in her three years of my time and then I got transferred to the *Lucy Apse*, for a year. The sailmaker we had in the *Apse Family* turned up there, too, and I remember him saying to me one evening, after we had been a week at sea: 'Isn't she a meek little ship?' No wonder we thought the *Lucy Apse* a dear, meek, little ship after getting clear of that big rampaging savage brute. It was like heaven. Her officers seemed to me the restfullest lot of men on earth. To me, who had known no ship but the *Apse Family*, the *Lucy* was like a sort of magic craft that did what you wanted her to do of her own accord. One evening we got caught aback pretty sharply from right ahead. In about ten minutes we had her full again, sheets aft, tacks down, decks cleared, and the officer of the watch leaning against the weather-rail peacefully. It seemed simply marvellous to me. The other would have stuck for half an hour in irons, rolling her decks full of water, knocking the men about—spars cracking, braces snapping, yards taking charge, and a confounded scare going on aft because of her beastly rudder, which she had a way of flapping about fit to raise your hair on end. I couldn't get over my wonder for days.

"Well, I finished my last year of apprenticeship in that jolly little ship—she wasn't so little either, but after that other heavy devil she seemed but a plaything to handle. I finished my time and passed; and then, just as I was thinking of having three weeks of real good time on shore, I got at breakfast a letter asking me the earliest day I could be ready to join the *Apse Family* as third mate. I gave my plate a shove that shot it into the middle of the table; Dad looked up over his paper; Mother raised her hands in astonishment, and I went out bareheaded into our bit of garden, where I walked round and round for an hour.

"When I came in again, Mother was out of the dining-room and Dad had shifted berth into his big armchair. The letter was lying on the mantelpiece.

"'It's very creditable to you to get the offer and very kind of them to make it,' he said. 'And I see also that Charles has

been appointed chief mate of that ship for one voyage.'

" There was overleaf a PS. to that effect in Mr. Apse's own handwriting, which I had overlooked. Charley was my big brother.

" ' I don't like very much to have two of my boys together in one ship,' Father goes on, in his deliberate, solemn way. ' And I may tell you that I would not mind writing Mr. Apse a letter to that effect.'

" Dear old Dad! He was a wonderful father. What would you have done? The mere notion of going back (and as an officer, too), to be worried and bothered and kept on the jump night and day by that brute made me feel sick. But she wasn't a ship you could afford to fight shy of. Besides, the most genuine excuse could not be given without mortally offending Apse & Sons. The firm, and I believe the whole family down to the old unmarried aunts in Lancashire, had grown desperately touchy about that accursed ship's character. This was the case for answering ' Ready now ' from your very deathbed if you wished to die in their good grace. And that's precisely what I did answer—by wire, to have it over and done with at once.

" The prospect of being shipmates with my big brother cheered me up considerably, though it made me a bit anxious, too. Ever since I remember myself as a little chap he had been very good to me and I looked upon him as the finest fellow in the world. And so he was. No better officer ever walked the deck of a merchant ship. And that's a fact. He was a fine, strong, upstanding, sun-tanned young fellow, with his brown hair curling a little, and an eye like a hawk. He was just splendid. We hadn't seen each other for many years, and even this time, though he had been in England three weeks already, he hadn't showed up at home yet, but had spent his spare time in Surrey somewhere, making up to Maggie Colchester, old Captain Colchester's niece. Her father, a great friend of Dad's, was in the sugar-broking business, and Charley made a sort of second home of their house. I wondered what my big brother would think of me. There was a sort of sternness about Charley's face which never left it, not even when he was larking in his rather wild fashion.

" He received me with a great shout of laughter. He seemed to think my joining as an officer the greatest joke in the world. There was a difference of ten years between us and I suppose he remembered me best in pinafores. I was a kid of four when he first went to sea. It surprised me to find how boisterous he could be.

" ' Now we shall see what you are made of,' he cried. And he held me off by the shoulders and punched my ribs and hustled me into his berth. ' Sit down, Ned. I am glad of the chance of having you with me. I'll put the finishing touch to you, my young officer, providing you're worth the trouble. And, first of all, get it well into your head that we are not going to let this brute kill anybody this voyage. We'll stop her racket.'

" I perceived he was in dead earnest about it. He talked grimly of the ship and how we must be careful and never allow this ugly beast to catch us napping with any of her damned tricks.

" He gave me a regular lecture on special seamanship for the use of the *Apse Family*; then, changing his tone, he began to talk at large, rattling off the wildest, funniest nonsense, till my sides ached with laughing. I could see very well he was a bit above himself with high spirits. It couldn't be because of my coming. Not to that extent. But, of course, I wouldn't have dreamt of asking what was the matter. I had a proper respect for my big brother, I can tell you. But it was all made plain enough a day or two afterwards, when I heard that Miss Maggie Colchester was coming for the voyage. Uncle was giving her a sea-trip for the benefit of her health.

" I don't know what could have been wrong with her health. She had a beautiful colour and a deuce of a lot of fair hair. She didn't care a rap for wind, or rain, or spray, or sun, or green seas, or anything. She was a blue-eyed, jolly girl of the very best sort, but the way she cheeked my big brother used to frighten me. I always expected it to end in an awful row. However, nothing decisive happened till after we had been in Sydney for a week. One day, in the men's dinner hour, Charley sticks his head into my cabin. I was stretched out on my back on the settee, smoking in peace.

" ' Come ashore with me, Ned,' he says, in his curt way.

" I jumped up, of course, and away after him down the gangway and up George Street. He strode along like a giant, and

I at his elbow, panting. It was confoundedly hot. ' Where on earth are you rushing me to, Charley ? ' I made bold to ask.

" ' Here,' he says.

" ' Here ' was a jeweller's shop. I couldn't imagine what he could want there. It seemed a sort of mad freak. He thrusts under my nose three rings, which looked very tiny on his big, brown palm, growling out :

" ' For Maggie ! Which ? '

" I got a kind of scare at this. I couldn't make a sound, but I pointed at the one that sparkled white and blue. He put it in his waistcoat pocket, paid for it with a lot of sovereigns, and bolted out. When we got on board I was quite out of breath. ' Shake hands, old chap,' I gasped out. He gave me a thump on the back. ' Give what orders you like to the boatswain when the hands turn-to,' says he ; ' I am off duty this afternoon.'

" Then he vanished from the deck for a while, but presently he came out of the cabin with Maggie, and these two went over the gangway publicly, before all hands, going for a walk together on that awful, blazing, hot day, with clouds of dust flying about. They came back after a few hours looking very staid, but didn't seem to have the slightest idea where they had been. Anyway, that's the answer they both made to Mrs. Colchester's question at tea-time.

" And didn't she turn on Charley, with her voice like an old night-cabman's ! ' Rubbish. Don't know where you've been ! Stuff and nonsense. You've walked the girl off her legs. Don't do it again.'

" It's surprising how meek Charley could be with that old woman. Only on one occasion he whispered to me : ' I'm jolly glad she isn't Maggie's aunt, except by marriage. That's no sort of relationship.' But I think he let Maggie have too much of her own way. She was hopping all over that ship in her yachting skirt and a red tam-o'-shanter like a bright bird on a dead black tree. The old salts used to grin to themselves when they saw her coming along, and offered to teach her knots or splices. I believe she liked the men, for Charley's sake, I suppose.

" As you may imagine, the diabolic propensities of that cursed ship were never spoken of on board. Not in the cabin, at any rate. Only once on the homeward passage Charley said, incautiously, something about bringing all her crew home this time. Captain Colchester began to look uncomfortable at once and that silly, hard-bitten old woman flew out at Charley as though he had said something indecent. I was quite confounded myself ; as to Maggie, she sat completely mystified, opening her blue eyes very wide. Of course, before she was a day older she wormed it all out of me. She was a very difficult person to lie to.

" ' How awful,' she said, quite solemn. ' So many poor fellows. I am glad the voyage is nearly over. I won't have a moment's peace about Charley now.'

" I assured her Charley was all right. It took more than that ship knew to get over a seaman like Charley. And she agreed with me.

" Next day we got the tug off Dungeness ; and when the tow-rope was fast Charley rubbed his hands and said to me in an undertone :

" ' We've baffled her, Ned.'

" ' Looks like it,' I said, with a grin at him. It was beautiful weather and the sea as smooth as a millpond. We went up the river without a shadow of trouble except once, when off Hole Haven, the brute took a sudden sheer and nearly had a barge anchored just clear of the fairway. But I was aft, looking after the steering, and she did not catch me napping that time. Charley came up on the poop, looking very concerned. ' Close shave,' says he.

" ' Never mind, Charley,' I answered, cheerily. ' You've tamed her.'

" We were to tow right up to the dock. The river pilot boarded us below Gravesend, and the first words I heard him say were : ' You may just as well take your port anchor inboard at once, Mr. Mate.'

" This had been done when I went forward. I saw Maggie on the forecastle head, enjoying the bustle, and I begged her to go aft, but she took no notice of me, of course. Then Charley, who was very busy with the head gear, caught sight of her and shouted in his biggest voice : ' Get off the forecastle head, Maggie. You're in the way here.' For all answer she made a funny face at him, and I saw poor Charley turn away, hiding a smile. She was flushed with the excitement of getting home again and her blue eyes seemed to snap electric sparks as she looked at the river. A collier brig had gone round just ahead of us and our tug had to stop her engines in a hurry to avoid running into her.

" In a moment, as is usually the case, all the shipping in the reach seemed to get into a hopeless tangle. A schooner and a ketch got up a small collision all to themselves right in the middle of the river. It was exciting to watch and, meantime, our tug remained stopped. Any other ship than that brute could have been coaxed to keep straight for a couple of minutes—but not she! Her head fell off at once, and she began to drift down, taking her tug along with her. I noticed a cluster of coasters at anchor within a quarter of a mile of us, and I thought I had better speak to the pilot. ' If you let her get amongst that lot,' I said, quietly, ' she will grind some of them to bits before we get her out again.'

" ' Don't I know her! ' cries he, stamping his foot in a perfect fury. And he out with his whistle to make that bothered tug get the ship's head up again as quick as possible. He blew like mad, waving his arm to port, and presently we could see that the tug's engines had been set going ahead. Her paddles churned the water, but it was as if she had been trying to tow a rock—she couldn't get an inch out of that ship. Again the pilot blew his whistle and waved his arm to port. We could see the tug's paddles turning faster and faster away, broad on our bow.

" For a moment, tug and ship hung motionless in a crowd of moving shipping, and then the terrific strain that evil, stony-hearted brute would always put on everything tore the towing-chock clean out. The tow-rope surged over, snapping the iron stanchions of the head-rail one after another as if they had been sticks of sealing-wax. It was only then I noticed that in order to have a better view over our heads, Maggie had stepped upon the port anchor as it lay flat on the forecastle deck.

" It had been lowered properly into its hardwood beds, but there had been no time to take a turn with it. Anyway, it was quite secure as it was, for going into dock; but I could see directly that the tow-rope would sweep under the fluke in another second. My heart flew up right into my throat, but not before I had time to yell out: ' Jump clear of that anchor! '

" But I hadn't time to shriek out her name. I don't suppose she heard me at all. The first touch of the hawser against the fluke threw her down; she was up on her feet again as quick as lightning, but she was up on the wrong side. I heard a horrid, scraping sound and then that anchor, tipping over, rose up like something alive; its great, rough iron arm caught Maggie round the waist, seemed to clasp her close with a dreadful hug, and flung itself with her over and down in a terrific clang of iron, followed by heavy ringing blows that shook the ship from stern to stem—because the ring stopper held! "

" How horrible! " I exclaimed.

" I used to dream for years afterwards of anchors catching hold of girls," said the man in tweeds, a little wildly. He shuddered. " With a most pitiful howl, Charley was over after her almost on the instant. But, Lord! he didn't see as much as a gleam of her red tam-o'-shanter in the water. Nothing! nothing whatever! In a moment there were half a dozen boats around us and he got pulled into one. I, with the boatswain and the carpenter, let go the other anchor in a hurry and brought the ship up somehow. The pilot had gone silly. He walked up and down the forecastle head, wringing his hands and muttering to himself: ' Killing women, now! Killing women, now! '

" Dusk fell, then a night black as pitch; and, peering upon the river, I heard a low, mournful hail: ' Ship, ahoy! ' Two Gravesend watermen came alongside. They had a lantern in their wherry and looked up the ship's side, holding on to the ladder without a word. I saw in the patch of light a lot of loose, fair hair down there."

¶

HE shuddered again.

" After the tide turned, poor Maggie's body had floated clear of one of them big mooring buoys," he explained. " I crept aft, feeling half-dead and managed to send a rocket up—to let the other searchers know, on the river. I spent the night sitting on the heel of the bowsprit, so as to be as far as possible out of Charley's way."

" Poor fellow! " I murmured.

" Yes. Poor fellow," he repeated musingly. " That brute wouldn't let him—not even him—cheat her of her prey. But he made her fast in dock next morning. He did. We hadn't exchanged a word—not a single look for that matter. I didn't want to look at him. When the last rope was fast he put his hands to his head and stood gazing down at his feet as if trying to remember something. The men waited on the main deck for the words that end the

voyage. Perhaps that is what he was trying to remember. I spoke for him. 'That'll do, men.'

"I never saw a crew leave a ship so quietly. They sneaked over the rail one after another, taking care not to bang their sea chests too heavily. They looked our way, but not one had the stomach to come up and offer to shake hands with the mate, as is usual.

"I followed him all over the empty ship, to and fro, here and there, with no living soul about but the two of us, because the old ship-keeper had locked himself up in the galley—both doors. Suddenly poor Charley mutters, in a crazy voice: 'I'm done here,' and strides down the gangway with me at his heels, up the dock, out at the gate, on towards Tower Hill. He used to take rooms with a decent old landlady in America Square, to be near his work.

"All at once he stops short, turns round and comes back straight at me. 'Ned,' says he, 'I am going home.' I had the good luck to sight a four-wheeler and got him in just in time. His legs were beginning to give way. In our hall he fell down on a chair and I'll never forget Father's and Mother's amazed, perfectly still faces as they stood over him. They couldn't understand what had happened to him till I blubbered out: 'Maggie got drowned, yesterday, in the river.'

"Mother let out a little cry. Father looks from him to me and from me to him, as if comparing our faces—for, upon my soul, Charley did not resemble himself at all. Nobody moved: and the poor fellow raises his big brown hands slowly to his throat and, with one single tug, rips everything open—collar, shirt, waistcoat—a perfect wreck and ruin of a man. Father and I got him upstairs somehow, and Mother pretty nearly killed herself nursing him through a brain fever."

The man in tweeds nodded at me significantly.

"Ah! there was nothing that could be done with that brute. She had a devil in her."

"Where's your brother?" I asked, expecting to hear he was dead. But he was commanding a smart steamer on the China coast and never came home now.

Jermyn fetched a heavy sigh, and the handkerchief being now sufficiently dry, put it up tenderly to his red and lamentable nose.

"She was a ravening beast," the man in tweeds started again. "Old Colchester put his foot down and resigned. And would you believe it? Apse & Sons wrote to ask whether he wouldn't reconsider his decision! Anything to save the good name of the *Apse Family!* Old Colchester went to the office then and said that he would take charge again, but only to sail her out into the North Sea and scuttle her there. He was nearly off his chump. He used to be darkish iron-grey, but his hair went snow-white in a fortnight. And Mr. Lucian Apse (they had known each other as young men) pretended not to notice it. Eh? Here's infatuation if you like! Here's pride for you!

"They jumped at the first man they could get to take her, for fear of the scandal of the *Apse Family* not being able to find a skipper. He was a festive soul, I believe, but he stuck to her grim and hard. Wilmot was his second mate. A harum-scarum fellow and pretending to a great scorn for all the girls. The fact is he was really timid. But let only one of them do as much as lift her little finger in encouragement and there was nothing that could hold the beggar. As apprentice, once, he deserted abroad after a petticoat and would have gone to the dogs then if his skipper hadn't taken the trouble to find him and lug him by the ears out of some house of perdition or other.

"It was said that one of the firm had been heard once to express a hope that this brute of a ship would get lost soon. I can hardly credit the tale, unless it might have been Mr. Alfred Apse, whom the family didn't think much of. They had him in the office, but he was considered a bad egg altogether, always flying off to race meetings and coming home drunk. You would have thought that a ship so full of deadly tricks would run herself ashore some day out of sheer cussedness. But not she! She was going to last for ever. She had a nose to keep off the bottom."

Jermyn made a grunt of approval.

"A ship after a pilot's own heart, eh?" jeered the man in tweeds. "Well, Wilmot managed it. He was the man for it; but even he, perhaps, couldn't have done the trick without that green-eyed governess, or nurse, or whatever she was to the children of Mr. and Mrs. Pamphilius.

"Those people were passengers in her from Port Adelaide to the Cape. Well, the ship went out and anchored outside for the

day. The skipper—hospitable soul—had a lot of guests from town to a farewell lunch—as usual with him. It was five in the evening before the last shore-boat left the side and the weather looked ugly and dark in the gulf. There was no reason for him to get under way. However, as he had told everybody he was going that day, he imagined it was proper to do so, anyhow. But as he had no mind after all these festivities to tackle the straits in the dark, with a scant wind, he gave orders to keep the ship under lower topsails and foresail as close as she would lie, dodging along the land till the morning. Then he sought his virtuous couch. The mate was on deck, having his face washed very clean with hard rain squalls. Wilmot relieved him at midnight.

" The *Apse Family* had, as you observed, a house on her poop. . . ."

" A big, ugly, white thing, sticking up," Jermyn murmured sadly, at the fire.

" That's it: a companion for the cabin stairs and a sort of chart-room combined. The rain drove in gusts on the sleepy Wilmot. The ship was then surging slowly to the southward, close hauled, with the coast within three miles or so to windward. There was nothing to look out for in that part of the gulf, and Wilmot went round to dodge the squalls under the lee of that chart-room, whose door on that side was open. The night was black, like a barrel of coal-tar. And then he heard a woman's voice whispering to him.

" That confounded green-eyed girl of the Pamphilius people had put the kids to bed a long time ago, of course, but it seems couldn't get to sleep herself. She heard eight bells struck and the chief mate come below to turn in. She waited a bit, then got into her dressing-gown and stole across the empty saloon and up the stairs into the chart-room. She sat down on the settee near the open door to cool herself, I dare say.

" I suppose when she whispered to Wilmot it was as if somebody had struck a match in the fellow's brain. I don't know how it was they had got so very thick. I fancy he had met her ashore a few times before. I couldn't make it out, because, when telling the story, Wilmot would break off to swear something awful at every second word. We had met on the quay in Sydney and he had an apron of sacking up to his chin, a big whip in his hand. A wagon-driver. Glad to do anything not to starve. That's what he had come down to.

" However, there he was, with his head inside the door, on the girl's shoulder as likely as not—officer of the watch! The helmsman, on giving his evidence afterwards, said that he shouted several times that the binnacle lamp had gone out. It didn't matter to him, because his orders were to ' sail her close.' ' I thought it funny,' he said, ' that the ship should keep on falling off in squalls, but I luffed her up every time as close as I was able. It was so dark I couldn't see my hand before my face, and the rain came in bucketsful on my head.'

" The truth was that at every squall the wind hauled aft a little, till gradually the ship came to be heading straight for the coast, without a single soul in her being aware of it. Wilmot himself confessed that he had not been near the standard compass for an hour. He might well have confessed! The first thing he knew was the man on the look-out shouting blue murder forward there.

" He tore his neck free, he says, and yelled back at him: ' What do you say? '

" ' I think I hear breakers ahead, sir,' howled the man and came rushing aft with the rest of the watch, in the ' awfullest blinding deluge that ever fell from the sky,' Wilmot says. For a second or so he was so scared and bewildered that he could not remember on which side of the gulf the ship was. He wasn't a good officer, but he was a seaman all the same. He pulled himself together in a second and the right orders sprang to his lips without thinking. They were to hard up with the helm and shiver the main and mizzen-topsails.

" It seems that the sails actually fluttered. He couldn't see them, but he heard them rattling and banging above his head. ' No use! She was too slow in going off,' he went on, his dirty face twitching and the damn'd carter's whip shaking in his hand. ' She seemed to stick fast.' And then the flutter of the canvas above his head ceased. At this critical moment the wind hauled aft again with a gust, filling the sails and sending the ship with a great way upon the rocks on her lee bow. She had overreached herself in her last little game. Her time had come—the hour, the man, the black night, the treacherous gust of wind—the right woman to put an end to her. The brute deserved nothing better. Strange are the instruments of Providence. There's a sort of poetical justice——"

The man in tweeds looked hard at me.

"The first ledge she went over stripped the false keel off her. Rip! The skipper, rushing out of his berth, found a crazy woman, in a red-flannel dressing-gown, flying round and round the cuddy, screeching like a cockatoo.

"The next bump knocked her clean under the cabin table. It also started the stern-post and carried away the rudder, and then that brute ran up a shelving, rocky shore, tearing her bottom out, till she stopped short and the foremast dropped over the bows like a gangway."

"Anybody lost?" I asked.

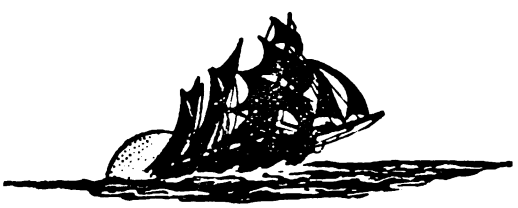
"No one, unless that fellow, Wilmot," answered the gentleman, unknown to Miss Blank looking round for his cap. "And his case was worse than drowning for a man. Everybody got ashore all right. Gale didn't come on till next day, dead from the West, and broke up that brute in a surprisingly short time. It was as though she had been rotten at heart. . . ." He changed his tone. "Rain left off. I must get my bike and rush home to dinner. I live in Herne Bay—came out for a spin this morning."

He nodded at me in a friendly way and went out with a swagger.

"Do you know who he is, Jermyn?" I asked.

The North Sea pilot shook his head, dismally. "Fancy losing a ship in that silly fashion! Oh dear! oh dear!" he groaned in lugubrious tones, spreading his damp handkerchief again like a curtain before the glowing grate.

On going out I exchanged a glance and a smile (strictly proper) with the respectable Miss Blank, barmaid of the Three Crows.



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"*Such Stuff as Dreams—*"

The Dream of the Argonauts

AND all things stayed around and listened; the gulls sat in white lines along the rocks; on the beach great seals lay basking, and kept time with lazy heads; while silver shoals of fish came up to hearken, and whispered as they broke the shining calm. The wind overhead hushed his whistling, as he shepherded his clouds towards the west; and the clouds stood in mid-blue, and listened dreaming, like a flock of golden sheep. And as the heroes listened the oars fell from their hands, and their heads dropped on their breasts, and they closed their heavy eyes; and they dreamed of bright, still gardens, and of slumbers under murmuring pines, till all their toil seemed foolishness, and they thought of their renown no more. CHARLES KINGSLEY.

After Reading in Bed

AFTER the Lassitude of a Day, spent in the strolling Manner, which is usual with Men of Pleasure in this Town, and with a Head full of a Million of Impertinencies, which had danced round it for ten Hours together, I came to my Lodging, and hastened to bed. My *Valet de Chambre* knows my University-Trick of reading there; and he, being a good Scholar for a Gentleman, ran over the Names of *Horace*, *Tibullus*, *Ovid*, and others, to know which I would have. Bring *Vigil*, said I; and, if I fall asleep, take care of the Candle. I read the Sixth Book over with the most exquisite Delight, and had gone half through it a second time, when the pleasant Ideas of *Elysian* Fields, deceased Worthies walking in them, sincere Lovers enjoying their Languishment without Pain, Compassion for the unhappy Spirits who had misspent their short Day-light, and were exiled from the Seats of Bliss for ever; I say, I was deep again in my Reading, when this Mixture of Images had taken place of all others in my Imagination before, and lulled me into a Dream, from which I am just awake, to my great Disadvantage. SIR RICHARD STEELE.

A Great Poet's Confession

IN his soft, low, yet clear, wistful tones, he (Thomas Hardy) related his one perennial dream.

"I am pursued, and I am rising like an angel up into heaven, out of the hands of my earthly pursuers." With a small, deprecating laugh, "I am agitated and hampered, as I suppose an angel would not be, by—a paucity of underlinen."

VIOLET HUNT.

Swedenborg Hears The Word

I THEREUPON fell asleep, and at about 12, 1 or 2 o'clock at night, there came over me so strong a shivering from head to foot, with a din, as in many winds rushed together, which shook me, was indescribable and prostrated me upon my face. Then, while I was prostrated, I was in a moment quite awake, and saw that I was cast down, and wondered what it meant. And I spoke as if I was awake, but found that the word was put into my mouth . . . EMANUEL SWEDENBORG.

A SKILFUL man reads dreams for his self-knowledge.

R. W. EMERSON.

The Vision of Boccacio

HERE in this chamber she appeared to me more visibly in a dream.

"Thy prayers have been heard, O Giovanni," said she. I sprang to embrace her.

"Do not spill the water! Ah! you have spilt a part of it."

I then observed in her hand a crystal vase. A few drops were sparkling on the sides and running down the rim; a few were trickling from the base and from the hand that held it.

"I must go down to the brook," said she, "and fill it again as it was filled before."

What a moment of agony was this to me! Could I be certain how long might be her absence? She went: I was following: she made a sign for me to turn back: I disobeyed her only an instant: yet my sense of disobedience, increasing my feebleness and confusion, made me lose sight of her. In the next moment she was again at my side, with the cup quite full. I stood motionless: I feared my breath might shake the water over. I looked her in the face for her commands—and to see it—to see it so calm, so beneficient, so beautiful. I was forgetting what I had prayed for, when she lowered her head, tasted of the cup, and gave it me. I drank; and suddenly sprang forth before me, many groves and palaces and gardens, and their statues and their avenues, and their labyrinths of alaternus and bay, and alcoves of citron, and watchful loopholes in the retirements of impenetrable pomegranate. Farther off, just below where the fountain slipped away from its marble hall and guardian gods, arose, from their beds of moss and drosera and darkest grass, the sisterhood of oleanders, fond of tantalising with their bosomed flowers and their moist and pouting blossoms the little shy rivulet, and of covering its face with all the colours of the dawn.

WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR.

Dream-Pedlary

IF there were dreams to sell,
What would you buy?
Some cost a passing bell;
Some a light sigh,
That shakes from Life's fresh crown
Only a rose-leaf down.
If there were dreams to sell,
Merry and sad to tell,
And the crier rang the bell,
What would you buy?

A cottage lone and still,
With bowers nigh,
Shadowy, my woes to still,
Until I die.
Such peace from Life's fresh crown
Fain would I shake me down.
Were dreams to have at will,
This would best heal my ill,
This would I buy.

THOMAS LOVELL BEDDOES.

THERE is no reason why we should not get together while we can and tell each other our dreams. PLATO.

Opium Trance

THE sense of space and in the end, the sense of time, were powerfully affected. Buildings, landscapes, etc., were exhibited in proportions so vast as the bodily eye is not fit to receive. Space swelled and was amplified to an extent of unutterable infinity. This, however, did not disturb me so much as the expansion of time. I sometimes lived for seventy or a hundred years in one night: nay, sometimes had feelings of a millenium passed in that time, or however, of a duration for beyond the limits of any human experience.

Thomas de Quincy.

Mr. Holdforth's Nightmare at Wuthering Heights

MERELY the branch of a fir-tree that touched my lattice as the blast wailed by, and rattled its dry cones against my panes! . . . I heard the bough repeat its teasing sound, and ascribed it to the right cause; . . . and, I thought, I rose and endeavoured to unhasp the casement. The hook was soldered into the casement; a circumstance observed by me when awake, but forgotten. "I must stop it nevertheless!" I muttered, knocking my knuckles thro' the glass, and stretching an arm out to seize the importunate branch; instead of which my fingers closed on the fingers of a little, ice-cold hand! The intense horror of nightmare came over me; I tried to draw back my arm, but the hand clung to it, and a most melancholy voice sobbed "Let me in—let me in!" "Who are you?" I asked, struggling, meanwhile, to disengage myself. "Catherine Linton," it replied shiveringly; "I'm come home; I'd lost my way on the moor!" As it spoke, I discerned, obscurely, a child's face looking through the window.

Emily Brontë.

After Studying Heathen Mythology

I WAS converted into a mighty pillar of stone, which reared its head in the midst of a desert, where it stood for ages, till generation after generation melted away before it. Even in this state, though unconscious of possessing any organs of sense, or being else than a mass of lifeless stone, I saw every object around—the mountains growing bald with age, the forest trees drooping in decay. At last, I waxed old and began to crumble into dust, while the moss and ivy accumulated upon me and stamped me with the aspect of hoar antiquity.

Robert MacNish.

The Pilgrim's First Revelation

AS I walked through the wilderness of this world, I lighted on a certain place where was a den; and I laid me down in that place to sleep; and as I slept I dreamed a dream. I dreamed, and behold I saw a man clothed with rags, standing in a certain place, with his face from his own house, a book in his hand, and a great burden upon his back. I looked and saw him open the book and read therein; and as he read he wept and trembled; and, not being able longer to contain, he brake out with a lamentable cry, saying, What shall I do?

John Bunyan.

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The Nod

A sign and what hung thereon

By MAARTEN MAARTENS

Readers of "Dorothea" and other successful novels by Maarten Maartens the Dutch writer who chose the English language for his medium will be interested to read this excellent example of his skill as a short-story writer. His profound understanding of the human heart is amply illustrated in this dramatic tale

THE whole orchard was a glory of apple-blossom. A flush of pink and white, in great clouds of softness, between the blue sky and the green grass.

Two lovers, young and pleasant to look upon, moved slowly among the trees. The golden sunlight played all about them, through the branches and under their feet. A number of finches were at work in the coppice that bordered the apple-field. Their twitterings and flitterings seemed everywhere. One only had struck work—to sing. The world, in its million conscious throbbings, was full of the music of nesting and pairing and making love. The buds burst open to see.

"It's no use. It can't be," said the young man, despondingly. He was a tall young man, well grown, but pale and thin, with the serious countenance of a student who takes to heart the studies he has chosen for his own.

"Oh, Bart!" she said, for that was his name—Bartholomew.

"Your father won't let us marry, unless he can keep you here in this village. And how can I stay in the village, unless they elect me as minister? And they'll never elect me as minister unless Elder Preek approves of my sermon. And how can I ever hope to preach a sermon of which Elder Preek will approve?"

He turned on her in a melancholy triumph. He had never put the case so succinctly before.

"Yes, yes, I know," she replied sadly. "But—oh, Bart!—at least you might try."

"I have been trying—turning it over in my mind—for weeks and months, ever since the parish here fell vacant. Trying! Dear Heaven, how I have tried! All these days I have been working at to-morrow's sermon. All this morning I have been polishing it, twisting it and picking out the faults. What's the good? It doesn't read a bit like Elder Preek!"

"Perhaps," she said faintly, "they won't mind so much what he thinks."

"You know better, Katrine. The whole lot of them lie in the hollow of the Elder's horny palm. The religious life of five thousand souls is entirely dependent on the crabbed theology, the metaphysical freaks, of a tyrannous old pump-maker. The Apostle Paul himself wouldn't stand a chance against Elder Preek."

"Do you know," she said meditatively, "that's what I've been thinking."

"Of course he wouldn't. Try Preek with some properly amended text, and I'll wager he'll tell you it isn't true."

"I don't mean that exactly. I mean—Bart, I could never tell you what I mean."

"Why not?"

"Because it's so horribly wicked," she almost whispered: "I can't get it out of my head at nights, but it's horribly wicked, Bart."

"Can you think of wicked things, Katrine?"

"If you only knew!" she answered. "It's a way that *might* succeed, Bart—a horribly wicked way."

He laughed, and an apple-blossom fluttered to his feet.

"Supposing you took an old sermon," she whispered, her head against his shoulder, "a very, very old sermon, one of those by the seventeenth-century divines who preach that the chief delight of the saints will be watching the torments of the damned, and supposing you made your discourse out of that for to-morrow?" Her tones were not absolutely serious, in spite of herself—a medley of hope and despair.

"It would spoil in the making," he answered. "Katrine, if you don't look out, Elder Preek will be enjoying your

torments some day." Then he caught her to his breast and kissed her vehemently, miserably, again and again. She disengaged herself, but, instead of smiling, began to cry. A moment afterwards she wiped her eyes.

"It's too bad," she said, looking away. "All our happiness—the whole future—ruined by one dreadful old man!" And she walked off quickly to the farmhouse, to hide her face in her motherly mother's lap.

¶

BART Visser also went back to his mother, the schoolmaster's widow, in her humbler cottage against the firs. The shadows were sloping downwards; the day was sinking to rest. During their five-o'clock dinner he remained silent, absorbed in reflections on ecclesiasticism as contrasted with theology, and religion as estranged from both. His mother, a proud smile of approval on her countenance, left him to what she believed was prayerful consideration of his coming discourse. For her, as she sat munching her cabbage and sausages, this world had but little left to pray over. True, she had prayed much, and worked more, through the slow past years. In poverty and hard battle and desperate longing she had dragged her only child to the foot of the pulpit he was now preparing to mount.

And now Providence, that had often seemed inimical, had blessed her beyond her wildest aspirations. For there are many pulpits in Holland, and but few within the circle of her rustic experience. Who could have dared to foretell that the young candidate's first trial sermon would be preached in the church that had seen him worship as a child? Not for a moment did she doubt that the manifest hand of God, which had removed the former pastor, would safely pilot the candidate into the vacant manse. She would see him settled as pastor of her own village, the happy husband of a not impecunious and altogether delightful wife. Every time she realised this certain and immediate future, her eyes filled with joyful tears.

After dinner he came down to the lamp, with his manuscript in his hand. She established herself in her arm-chair and took up her needlework, trembling with glorious anticipation. Then he read, uninterruptedly, for little less than an hour. Occasionally his voice shook, but he eagerly steadied it. Half-way, she laid down her needlework in a tremble on her lap, and sat gazing at him. All her soul was in her face.

"Amen," he read, and remained silent, staring straight in front of him, away from her. She neither moved nor spoke. The whole room was full of a solemn stillness, and the look in the mother's eyes was adoration—of him.

The clock struck loudly, eight slow strokes, rousing him.

"I shall never be minister here," he said.

"What?" she screamed. Her needlework fell to the floor. "You frightened me," she said; "but you were always like that, Bart—no courage!"

"It wants more courage to preach that sermon than to leave it unpreached," he replied, nettled. "But I couldn't do better, if I tried."

"Nonsense!" said the mother. "It's beautiful."

"Beautiful or not, mother, it won't 'fetch' Elder Preek. And you know as well as I, that the others'll look at him all the time. If he doesn't nod—and he *won't* nod—Heavens, I might speak with the tongues of men and of angels, what's the use, as long as I haven't got Elder Preek?"

She sat listening, long after he had ceased, bitterly, to speak. Then she gasped:

"Are you—sure?"

"Yes; and so are you."

"I don't mean about their going by him," she continued in a curious voice. "That I know. But about his not approving. Why?"

"Because I can't get into his religious twist, mother. It is all a religious twist. Didn't you see I hadn't got it, as I read?"

"No. I was only thinking of the beautiful, beautiful things you said."

"It's not the phraseology only. I've tried to use that as far as I honestly could," he continued, speaking more to himself than to her. "I've never said . . . but the subject's too holy to dwell upon." He shook himself irritably. "There lies my sermon!"—he pointed—"Jacta est alea!"

"What, dear?" Her voice quivered.

"The place is lost. I can't help myself."

"God will."

"No use asking Him. He can't."

Her lips framed two words, left unspoken. "I will," they said to herself.

Aloud she exclaimed, almost imperiously: "Read me parts again. Read them slowly. Parts you feel sure he will disapprove of."

"I have expunged those already," he said with what would have been a twinkle had

it not died into a frown. " Twice as many remain."

" Read ! " she commanded, and he obeyed. It was a terrible reading, this second one, of fragments that rose out of the smoothness and cut them in the heart, sentences intended to be gentle and pious, that caught false reflections from the irony of his accent and features until they towered threatening above them, ready to fall and crush truth beneath their imaginary weight. Half-way she stopped him.

" True," she said : " it is not Neighbour Preek's religion. It is the religion of Jesus Christ."

He did not answer, for he could not. And so they sat in silence till there came a knocking at the door. Katrine stood before them. Her breast heaved, her cheeks were aflame.

He started up. " What is it ? "

She dropped into a chair. " I was coming here," she said, " and Jan Jansen joined me. I think he had been watching for me. And he asked me—he !—to give you up and be his wife."

" Jan Jansen ! " cried the widow, turning whiter than a sheet.

" Preek's nephew ! " exclaimed the candidate.

" He's past forty, and a ne'er-do-weel, and he drinks ! " cried the indignant damsel.

" Thirty-eight," gasped the widow. They both stared at her.

" Don't make him older or worse than he is," said the widow, recovering herself and speaking with asperity.

" He's old enough and bad enough," said the son.

" And like enough to be a dangerous rival to you, my boy," remarked his mother.

Katrine laughed, in scorn. " An enemy perhaps—not a rival," she said. " I'd die an old maid before I'd marry that boozing, bloated brute."

The widow shrank away as if in pain. " Yes, yes," she murmured. " True. You mustn't die an old maid, Katrine." And then the two lovers talked sadly of their prospects, while the mother stitched with downcast eyes.

Half-an-hour later he took his sweetheart home along the sleeping meadows, that breathe in sleep. The night was soft about them—he loved her as they went.

By the plank across the ditch she halted. " Father might see you ! " she said and, kissing him, went on alone.

She heard voices at the open door. Elder Preek was saying " good-bye " to her father.

" Ah, here she is ! " said the Elder. " Well, you can tell her what I came for."

" Tell her yourself," replied her father's fluent growl. He was a violent, bucolic, unreasonable man. Very different from thin Elder Preek, with his clear-cut nose and parchmenty death's-head, and pale cod-fish eyes.

" Well, my dear, I have come to your father to ask your hand for my nephew," announced the Elder.

" He shall have her," said the farmer.

" The young man is devotedly attached to you," continued Elder Preek. " Also he is not without earthly possessions."

" Fifteen thousand guilders," put in the farmer, with a cluck of his tongue.

" He drinks," said Katrine.

" Fie, for shame ! " exclaimed the Elder.

" She shall take him," persisted her father.

" Where is your maiden modesty ? " expostulated the Elder.

" I won't marry him," said Katrine.

" You shall marry no one else ! " bellowed her father.

She was silent. In the dusk her whole attitude betokened rebelliousness.

" I want to marry Bart," she said.

Elder Preek gave a snarl, like a dog.

" All right ! " laughed her father, spitefully. " I swear you shall marry Jan Jansen, or, if you *don't* marry him, well, then—Bart ! " He repeated the words with a truculent snigger. Already he saw her mistress of the fifteen thousand guilders.

" Bart ! Oh, of course," said the Elder. " Oh, yes, of course. Bart ! Of course ! " His tones were full of menace. He left the two standing in the dark by their doorstep, and walked away briskly out of sight. His homeward path led through a coppice and a short stretch of pine wood. It was very dark between the pines. He checked his pace, stumbling occasionally as he went.

A single star had pierced the blackness, shining clear through the tops of the trees.

" Lead us not into temptation ! " said the Elder. He said it over and over again as he went along. He stopped to say it, with renewed energy. Then he knelt down in the dark, on the moss by the path-side, and prayed. He prayed for guidance, that, in

his high office, he might remain impartial, as an elder should. He had run away from his human predilections by the farmhouse door. His prayer was honest enough in its way, Heaven, that listened to it, knows! He rose, greatly content with it, convinced of his moral victory, resolved to do his duty. The clerical question—solemn thought!—should remain entirely independent of the matrimonial one. The care of souls is not a thing to tamper with. And besides, there were always the fifteen thousand guilders to fall back upon. Whether Bart got the parish or not, Jan Jansen was a rich man compared with him.

¶

THE old man reached home with a countenance once more serene, or at any rate expressionless. His wife and children were accustomed to see it so. The unmarried daughter got him his Saturday evening "pap"; the wife laid out his Sunday things, the black suit, the spotless linen. He cleaned and arranged his big spectacles as usual, and read the evening chapter out of Ezra, the maid-servant yawning as usual, especially on Saturdays, half dead with the scrubbings and sloppings, the earthly tribulation and manifold mess.

He was undressing with slow precision, and descanting to his humbly acquiescent wife on the sacred probabilities of the morrow, when a handful of gravel was thrown at the illuminated window-pane. "The young man may be very worthy, I do not doubt," he was saying, "but, personally, I am afraid of these young slips of theology. The Overstad Professors rely on their own talents and not on the *Word*. What, I ask, is theology without the *Word?* Well, we shall see what we shall see. But it isn't learning that makes men preachers. It is power. And what is power but acceptance of the Word? They say the Bible was written in our hearts."

His wife, who had heard all this daily for years, nodded approval, yawning nearly as distinctly as the maid had done.

It was a good thing the Elder had not reached his weekly tepid tub, or the whole course of events would have been altered. Now he solemnly opened the window and solemnly demanded what was wrong.

"Come down! I must speak to you," replied a woman voice.

"Bart's mother!" ejaculated the Elder, drawing back his head.

"Don't go—she will only bother you," expostulated the wife.

"I must," replied Preek, already readjusting his clothing.

She called out something after him about the water getting cold; but his even soul, suddenly fluttered, was not in a mood to think of tubs.

"What do you come here for at this time of night?" he cried, hurriedly letting the widow in and closing the door. His voice trembled, with forebodings of harm.

"Well," she replied, "you can't say I trouble you often. We haven't spoken to each other for—how long is it?—nigh on forty years."

"All the more reason for me to ask you why you come to me now, at ten o'clock at night, and fling gravel at the window."

"I didn't want to disturb your children or the neighbours," she made answer. Her voice also, in its gasps, betrayed emotion. She caught at the shawl about her throat and tore it away.

"Sit down," he suggested.

"No," she said, quickly, like a blow. And, fighting for breath as she stood against the wall, she continued: "My son's future is in your hands to-morrow. I have come about that. You know it. You must get him the parish."

"That will not depend upon any favouritism of mine," he answered. "The Lord——"

She waved the phrase aside. "Forty years ago you also used such words as those," she said.

"I confess it," he answered humbly. "But forty years ago I did not mean them; now I do."

"I also mean what I say," she retorted grimly. "Conversation is best on those terms. Would that ours had always been such! And I say that you, who can do it, must do this thing for my son, Bart. *Must!*—do you hear?"

"Must me no musts!" he cried, turning fiercely—yet weakly, as a cat, not a dog, turns at bay.

In her face was the dog's resolve. "We understand each other," she said. "For nigh on forty years I have not darkened your door. The last time I stood here, on this very spot, a girl of eighteen, I had come to plead for my child. You sent me away."

"I looked after the child," he said sullenly.

" Now I am here again. Never should I have darkened this door, Jan Preek, but for the madness of a mother's love! Nor shall I slink away now, as I did then, to hide myself and my child from your sight. To-morrow I shall sit opposite you in church. I shall watch you all the time. You shall nod that cursed nod of yours that the angels laugh at—or weep; you shall sit nodding like a—like a Chinese doll, you scoundrel!"

He put up his hand. " Do not call me that!" he cried pleadingly.

She stopped, aghast, all her eloquence checked. " I—not—to call you that?"

" I wasn't converted then, Mary. Not that I should dare to call myself converted now. But I was a young man. It's as the twenty-fifth Psalm says: ' Remember not the transgressions of my youth—— '"

" And I don't remember them," she interrupted violently. " I've kept out of your way, as you've kept out of mine. But now, by the Heaven that hears me, you shall do this thing for my son!"

" Isn't the other your son as well?" he cried. " You forget that the one son's hope is the other son's despair!"

" I forget nothing. Could I but forget Jan Jansen! The other day he came up behind me in a narrow path. ' Get out of my way!' he says, drunk—and went stumbling by. ' That's my son,' says I: ' thank God no one knows it but I—and you!' " She pointed her finger on the old man's breast. Then she broke out: " He's not my son, not he, not my son. Bart's my son, that's the light of my eyes! Bart's my son, that's as unlike the other as my husband was unlike you!"

" At any rate, you've little cause to complain. He doesn't shame you as he shames me, my precious so-called nephew. And all my own children so respectable! Oh, dear! But look here, Mary "—his tone grew bright and business-like—" this marriage with Katrine'll be the saving of him. He's mad to have her, and he'll promise anything. He's going to take the pledge. To save a sinner—eh? And that your own son?"

He peered into her face. She gazed steadily back.

" Not as good as Bart, I grant you," he went on. "But there's more joy in heaven—you remember? He'll settle down and grow serious, as many a man has done!"

" As you have done," she answered.

" My sins are as scarlet. I trust that some day they may become whiter than snow."

" If they don't, it won't be for want of plastering," she replied, misjudging him to the end, in her bitter sense of injury. " Well, you must know what you do. I'm going back. If you don't nod approval of the sermon to-morrow—" she paused. He looked at her anxiously.

" If you don't—I get up at the end of the service and tell the story of Jan Jansen to the whole congregation."

He still gazed at her. It was no use trying to weaken the meaning in those steadfast eyes of hers.

" My wife!" he gasped.

" Look to her. That is your affair, not mine. I have never troubled her, nor you. I have no desire to trouble her now. And *you* "—she clenched her fist—" you would ruin my child's happiness!"

" But you don't understand," he protested, desperately. " It isn't a question of wanting or not wanting. My conscience ——"

" Go, talk about that with Jan Jansen," she answered, and left him.

He continued after her, following to the door: " The things of the house of the Lord, entrusted to my keeping——"

But she only turned in the dark and the night wind: " What I have sworn I have sworn," she said.

Like a man dazed he groped his way upstairs, to be scolded by his wife because the water had gone cold. For the first time since their marriage he got into his bed this Saturday night unwashed. What was the use of cleansing? He could not wash his soul.

Not that the weight of ancient sin lay heavy upon it. There was little room in his religion for regrets at the inevitable perversity of the old Adam. Sin, in fact, was its corner-stone. Nothing could be more gratifying than conviction of sin, especially as the wrong-doing was always past and over before the conviction came. You were convinced of your own dead sins or of your neighbour's active ones. But the sudden results of your transgression alive and screaming around you—these were a very different matter.

He tossed in his bed till he could endure the strain no longer. His was not the sort of piety that can pray lying down or in unspoken words. He got out on to the floor, in the chill darkness and, kneeling by the

bedside, poured forth continuous pleadings for a way of escape. What he asked, but did not hope for, was simply that the young man's sermon might prove a truly orthodox one, a source of blessing unto many, a legitimate recommendation to all. What appeal could be more righteous? If it were not granted, then he, the Elder, would fall as a martyr to the holiest of human responsibilities—he shuddered as he thought of the depth of the fall. His home life, as a husband and father, his public position, his name as a shepherd of other people's souls! He groaned aloud, praying on and on. His wife awoke and asked if anything was the matter. He answered that he was wrestling with the Devil. She turned on her side and slept. To himself, however, he felt that he was wrestling with God.

Yet the struggle was clearer than when, a couple of hours ago, he had wanted to act on Jan Jansen's behalf. Now he was being tempted, in the saving of himself, to lie against the Almighty. All this he saw distinctly, black and white in the routine of his theological reasoning.

¶

IN the morning his daughter found him absent-minded. She was not surprised, considering the importance of the approaching function. She saw his lips move repeatedly, and awe fell upon her.

The first face that he beheld in the full village church was the widow's. When the organ pealed forth the loud words of the opening psalm, in an outburst of voices, he had issued from the vestry with the other office-bearers, preceding the minister, as the custom is. He had walked to his place in the chancel, beside the rest and, turning from a brief inspection of the inside of his hat (an inevitable form), his eyes had looked straight into the widow's. They remained with him, steadily, deep down in his soul. His children were in church, of course, and his wife; he had made some feeble attempt to keep her away, but she had stared at him in uncomprehending astonishment.

He settled himself in his corner for the sermon; and to God, Who beheld him, there must have been an agony of petition in the sharp-set face. It was a last desperate appeal, for himself, for the congregation—a hope against hope. The nervous young candidate gave out his text: "That your love may abound!" His voice quivered with the weight of the words. Elder Preek's thin lips seemed to sink away. The subject foreboded evil—he had never seen much good come of youthful talk about "love." "The Word" wasn't love.

The widow's eyes were upon him. Many of the congregation frequently looked his way. His colleagues watched for his well-known signs of approval. Solemnly he sat there, as judge.

Solemnly, in the listening silence, the discourse flowed on. The young minister, gaining confidence, spoke straight from the heart to the heart. But that comes as an insult to a religious development which requires speech from the head to the head. Nevertheless, many there, especially among the women, were touched by his simple sincerity. It became evident that the current of feeling was favourable to the preacher; his audience were with him; he realised it, as every speaker in such a case must do. From his pulpit he could not catch sight of Elder Preek. It was his turn to hope against hope.

Elder Preek had given up hoping. He sat desperately, his head thrown back, with the eyes of the congregation upon him, fronting ruin.

One little motion of the head! One little motion! Just a feeble sign that he approved of this sentimental twaddle about love and charity and goodness, and all would be well. He was saved; his home-happiness, his high position intact. After all, the things the boy was saying were true enough, up to a point. There was no harm in them. No harm? In this false presentation of Jehovah? Better the lies of atheism than this half-truth of love.

"Amen!" said the preacher. The Elder started, and a strange sound escaped from his parched throat. The last word had rung his knell. There is still an immense difference between the chance you have resolved not to use and no chance at all.

Of the closing prayer and the singing he heard nothing. Nor did he hear the benediction; but he heard, as the congregation was rising, the widow's voice cry: "Stop!" She spoke very rapidly, and loudly, less like a speech than a cry.

"This man!" she exclaimed, pointing. She stood up in her seat, challenging him. The whole congregation, curious expectant—all the familiar faces—grouped untidily in the crowded aisle and side-seats, the whole mass of noisy humanity, suddenly hushed.

" This man, whom you have chosen as your spiritual adviser, whom you follow as sheep, do you know what he is? A father of illegitimate children, a hypocrite, and a rogue!"

Protests arose at this violation of the sacred edifice and ceremony; but " Hush! Hush!" cried other voices, anxious to know more.

" Jan Jansen, whom he calls his nephew, is his son!" screamed the widow. " And why doesn't he approve of my son's sermon? Because of religion and morality? Because he wants Katrine Dykmans to marry Jan Jansen and, if Bart gets the church, she'll marry *him!*"

One of the other elders had lifted his hand to command silence. The sexton had drawn near to remove the cause of this disturbance, but a couple of men that were by her pushed him back.

The candidate stood, white, in his pulpit. All his agony found utterance in one cry: " Mother, don't!"

" Peace!" said the old man, who had lifted his hand. Go thy ways!"

But now the wife of Preek intervened. She was in the front, red and shaking with indignation.

" No, indeed—no, by Heaven!" she said: " every soul that has heard the woman speak shall hear her words proved a lie."

The widow turned to her with contemptuous pity. " Poor creature, I am sorry for *you*," she said.

" It is a lie! Say that it is a lie, Preek!" The wretched wife waited for a moment in silence.

Preek gazed back at the sea of faces. His lips did not move.

She flung back to the widow. "What ghost of a proof have you that Jan Jansen is his son?"

" He is mine," replied the widow. " His and mine."

A thrill ran through the building. Bart fell forward on the cushion, his head sinking to prayer.

" I was a girl of eighteen," continued the widow, " in service at Overstad. We were secretly engaged. Ten years later I married the schoolmaster here."

In the long, dead silence, " It is true," said Preek.

To his astonishment he saw by their expressions that they were not inclined to be hard on him for the sins of his youth. He followed up his advantage.

" I couldn't marry her," he said quickly; " but I took care of the child."

" Yes," cried the widow; " he brought the child a lot in the lottery, and it turned up a prize!"

Then suddenly he realised that, by this betrayal, his cause was lost. No religious man among them had ever played in the lottery, and such as had done so had never gained a prize.

A loud murmur of disapproval ran straight down the aisle.

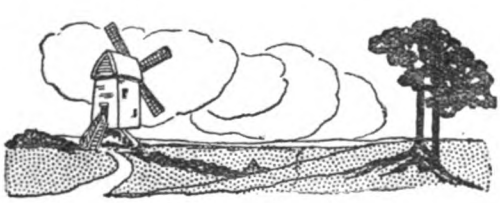
His brethren in the sacred office drew away from him. He was left standing alone. He lifted his poor trembling hands to Heaven.

" The zeal of Thine house," he said, in a voice little louder than a whisper, " hath eaten me up!"

Farmer Dykmans stood in front of the churchwardens' pew, shaking a gigantic fist.

" And ye fancied," he bellowed, " that I'd bestow my daughter on a drunken blackguard as hasn't even got a name of his own?"

The minister still lay forward, sunk low, with his head on the cushion. In the face of the whole congregation Katrine ran up the pulpit stairs, and bending over him, put her arm about his neck.



The Clarionet Player

A melody and its sequel

By BEATRICE HARRADEN

MONTH after month the clarionet player found his way to a certain street in the West End of London, and standing by the lamp at the corner of the pavement, began his recital. His tone was perfect; anyone hearing the unfailing rhythm of his phrasing would have known that he was no ordinary street musician. He came in all weathers—in the damp cold of the winter, and on the uncertain spring nights, and the long summer evenings, and was generally at his post any time between eight and nine. Month after month Janet Ravenscroft listened to him, and every time he came, the fixed sum of sixpence was sent out to him from the rich woman's house.

Sometimes he came when she was in the midst of a dinner party, engaged perhaps in listening to some interesting conversation, or herself talking with a really intelligent member of Parliament, or a distinguished traveller, or a successful playwright; for many persons of all sorts gathered together at her hospitable house. But whether she were hearing about our Imperial destinies, or the Russian peasant revolt, or the last new play, something in her memory became arrested when she heard the clarionet player; and she said to herself: "The clarionet player." Then she beckoned to the butler, who already knew what she meant, and she whispered to him: "Send out sixpence to the clarionet player."

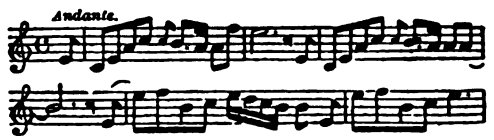
It was an unwritten rule in the household that if she did not hear him, she was immediately to be told of his arrival. She had never given instructions to that effect, but her wishes on the subject were taken for granted. And so, even if she were holding a musical reception, and some well-known *artiste* were singing or playing, the butler would wait until the song or the piece was finished, and then he would step softly in and say to her: "The clarionet player, madam." She never gave more than sixpence, except at Christmas, when the sixpence became a shilling. And he always sent back some message of thanks. "Tell the lady that I feel her kindness very greatly," he said; and once he said: "Tell the lady that I should come oftener, but that I do not like to encroach on her kindness"; and once he said: "Tell the lady that I have been away in Margate, doing a pretty fair season."

That was all that ever passed between them month after month.

She had never seen him, had never asked to see him, and had never questioned her servant about him. She seemed to have no curiosity concerning him; so that her interest in him was evidently not personal. It was, indeed, a memory, nothing save a memory. For in the years which were gone, her husband—happily for her, now dead—had played the clarionet, had played it with skill and feeling, with rhythm and with poetry; and now, whenever she heard its mournful voice, her thoughts, in spite of themselves, wandered back to the time when the man whom she had loved, and who had used her cruelly, had lifted his instrument to his lips and had filled the air with the haunting tones characteristic of the clarionet.

And since this unknown musician was merely the embodiment of a memory, it did not concern her whether he were tall or short, dark or fair, of grave or gay bearing, a broken down ne'er-do-well, or merely a careless Bohemian who might have seen better days. Indeed, she scarcely took the trouble to identify the music which he played: the usual Irish songs, of which he seemed to prefer "Rich and rare were the gems she wore"; various airs and variations from Donizetti and other Italian masters, passages from Weber's "Clarionet Concertino"; several *tours de force* which showed off his skill as an executant, and many plaintive melodies, in the rendering of which he was always at his best. She

scarcely noticed that he always began with the same melody. This was it :—



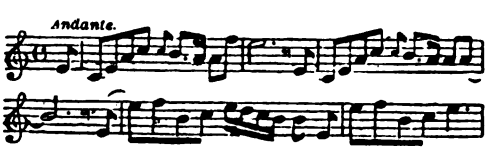
Her life was full. She had richest friends, many interests, increasing as the years went on. She was fifty years old. Her face, still beautiful, bore signs of grief, and although she never referred to her married life, it was known that Mrs. Ravenscroft had endured bitter years of tragic suffering and unhappiness. When her husband died, disgraced and in a foreign land, she could only be thankful that she was free at last. She was obliged to change her name on coming into a large fortune unexpectedly, and she was thus able to alter her whole mode of life and to forget that fifteen years of marriage had been to her fifteen years of misery. She was considered metallic by most people ; indeed, she gave out very little tenderness to anyone, and therefore received but little in exchange. Perhaps she had given all she had.

And then the clarionet player came. In the beginning she never thought of him except at the moment of his arrival and whilst he was playing. When he ceased playing and passed on his way, her reawakened memories fell into lethargy once more, and she took up her new life as though nothing had occurred to disturb its continuity. But as time went on, she found herself thinking about him ; and one day remembering that he had not been there lately, she said to the butler—

" Surely the clarionet player has not been here for some time ? "

" No, madam," he answered, " not for several weeks."

But at last he came again. She heard with a sense of relief his preliminary trills and shakes and runs, and the plaintive melody :—



She sent a message of welcome out to him, together with the usual sixpence.

" Tell the clarionet player that I have missed him and his beautiful music."

The answer came back : " Tell the lady that I have been ill, but that I am well again."

One day she herself fell ill. It was a winter trying both for the rich and the poor. She was ill for many weeks, weeks of great loneliness ; for in spite of her riches and her position, in spite of all her many interests and occupations, she was alone in the world. And her thoughts turned involuntarily to that unkown clarionet player. She longed to hear him. She began to wonder why she had never made inquiries about him, why she had never interested herself in his life and misfortunes, why she had let him come time after time, and go time after time, without even the slightest sign of personal sympathy. Then she began to excuse herself to herself, urging as a strong argument in favour of her attitude, that she had only erred on the side of wisdom. He was just a street musician, and she was a lonely, unprotected woman. It was better that she had erred on the side of wisdom.

At last he came again, eagerly waited for, although he did not know it, and she lay in her room listening more intently than ever before to his delicate phrasing. In the months that had passed, she had only listened half-heartedly, vaguely, distracted by her company and the circumstances of her life. But now she listened with all her heart and with all her hearing. That melody he was playing—*what was it ?* She remembered now that he always began with it, and played it more beautifully than anything else. Why did he always begin with it ? Ah ! there was a world of sorrow and regret and longing in it. Was it the expression of his own feelings ?

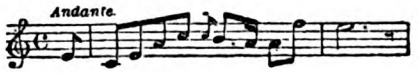
She sent out to ask the name of this beautiful, melancholy melody, and the answer came back : " Schumann's Third Romance for Oboe, arranged for clarionet."

A few more weeks passed, and she was still lying there, weak and ill, cut off from all her ordinary activities. And he came again.

For the first time an uncontrollable impulse seized her, and she felt she must see him. But at the moment when she reached the window and leaned out, she saw his tall form retreating down the street.

She saw him put his clarionet in his pocket and go his own way. She stood for a moment lost in thought. He was tall, then. . . .

With the return of spring, strength came back to her, and one evening she was sitting in her boudoir, still alone, and full of many thoughts, when she heard the sweet opening notes of the Schumann Romance :—



She touched the bell, and the butler came.

" Tell the clarionet player that I should be pleased to see him, if he can spare me a few minutes," she said, in her grave way.

The well-trained servant showed no sign of surprise. After he had gone, she moved aside the curtain of the window and looked across to the other side of the road, where the clarionet player was standing, as usual, near the street-lamp. She was anxiously restless whilst she was waiting ; those few minutes seemed to her like years. She laughed nervously at herself. " It must be because I've been ill," she said in excuse, " it is because I've been ill."

She went and stood against the mantelpiece and, resting her arm on the shelf, stared into the fire. The door opened, and the servant announced : " The clarionet player," and closed the door.

The musician came a few steps towards her, holding his clarionet in one hand and his hat in the other, with an old-world, easy grace and irresistible charm. There was a smile of gratified surprise on his pale but handsome face. He bowed and began in a soft voice—

" It is very good of you, madam, to wish to see me. I assure you I—— "

Then he broke off suddenly, as she turned round and looked at him.

" Good Heavens ! " he cried, with a sudden change of voice and manner. " Why, it's Janet ! "

She was still leaning against the mantelpiece, but her face had turned deadly white. Some words rose to her lips, but she could not give them utterance. She merely stared at him.

" Why don't you speak ? " he said roughly. " I know you—I should know you anywhere —you're Janet, my wife Janet, with the same steely face and steely manner that used to madden me with irritation."

She gave no sign.

Then he threw himself down in the armchair, threw himself back recklessly, rudely, and laughed as though in a frenzy. And still she did not stir, standing as one paralysed. He waved his arms in the air and clasped them over his head.

" Good Heavens ! " he cried, loosening them again and slapping his knees violently. " And to think you've only been sending me out sixpences ! You living in this fine house here, and I a poor devil out in the street ! Well, you have done me at last. To think you've only been sending me out *sixpences !* "

And he laughed, laughed. It was horrible to hear him. Suddenly he fell back and was silent, and his clarionet slipped to the ground.

Then she moved towards the chair and bent over him, and the stony expression of her face changed to a look of deep tenderness and longing and sympathy. The love which, as she believed, had died in her heart, sprang once more into flower when she saw again the husband whom she had loved, and who, so she had thought, was dead, and who had wrecked her life.

She bent over him and she put her hands on his shoulders.

" Oh, Ralph ! " she cried, with a whole world of passionate love in her voice. " Oh, Ralph ! if I had only known it was you, I should have sent out hundred, hundreds—all I had—you know it—surely you know it ! All I had—surely you know it, my Ralph. . . ."

There was no movement, no sound, for the clarionet player was dead.

Fuzzy-Face and Frazzle-Tail

A born conqueror and a double victory

By VINGIE E. ROE

HE was lost on the city street, unmistakably and piteously lost. He ran this way and that among the thronging crowds that streamed up Market Street from the Ferry Building, his ridiculous whiskered nose now questing the thousand-scented wind, now trailing on the asphalt. His anxious brown eyes looked up into this face and that and nowhere was there a moment's time to spare for him, a hand that could or would reach down to his tawny head. Here and there there was a heart that understood his plight and pitied, but these were the working crowds, bound for the big stores, the wholesale and retail districts, and none among them could possibly succour a lost dog and keep his job.

Here and there a man noticed and appreciated his points, the bright tawny head, legs and breast, the iron-grey saddle, the fine half-terrier ears, the heavy muzzle well filled with bone up under the eyes, the short flag-tail that proclaimed like scare-head type his unconscious claim to Airedale perfection.

There was a collar on his neck, a good collar, made of fine leather and studded with a vanity of nickel spots, but the tag that should have identified him—that tiny tag that stands so tragically between canine safety and stark danger—had been lost or taken off.

It was early morning, but he was thirsty, very thirsty. The night had been one long quest for food and water, but he had found nothing. He was not used to cities. That was plain.

Now the swelling traffic worried him. He was not afraid.

The sturdy and gallant heart beneath his grizzled coat was no kin to fear. But this everlasting stream that flowed and flowed and left no break that one might go safely through!

He got in people's way and some frowned and others gave him an impatient shove and one big creature in overalls kicked him sharply in the ribs. He tumbled out of the way and made himself small against the face of the great building, but the stream was just as dense here and there was only one way to go, so he got over at the pavement's edge and watched the changing and changeless mass of faces. The traffic cop saw him and frowned. A street-cleaner snapped kindly fingers at him. He was more anxious than he had ever been in all his life before, sick with the utter desolation of the lost; and it spoke as plainly as words from his appealing dark eyes.

And then, all suddenly—Market Street is a sudden place, for meetings of long-separated friends, for good-byes and for accidents—all suddenly the long, grey car came sliding with hushed and hooded mutter close to the kerb to pass the Safety Zone. It was a huge car, a monster, low-slung and opulent, and it looked like a cross between an airship and a submarine in its suggestion of swooping flight and its self-effacing colour. Its two occupants sat low in the pit, a man and a woman; and it was packed neatly and efficiently with the duffle of an outing trip

The woman was a little thing with vast beauty of face and form poorly concealed by her leather togs. A tip-tilted nose lifted itself above a bewitching red mouth—an imperious mouth with a short upper lip—and cool, grey eyes looked out from a fringe of dusky lashes.

The man was different. He was big, with the sliding muscular bigness that suggests perfect health. His mouth was whimsical and a flexible curve that could express great tenderness or a very quiet firmness. And the eyes above the freshly shaven cheeks were the most smiling and honest ones that you could find in a long day's journey—soft brown ones with little flecks of light in them.

As the grey monster muttered and swept slowly along the kerb the two pairs of brown eyes met, fairly and squarely—met

and clung with that friends-at-first-sight knowledge that sometimes attends fortunate meetings of strangers.

"Hallo! old boy," the man's eyes said and——

"Master!" the dog's eyes answered. Then the car drew away and rounded into the stream.

In the heart beneath the grey saddle a new sickness surged, a terrible panic of instant loss welled up. The bright and tragic eyes fixed on the disappearing car with overpowering despair—and the Airedale slipped off the kerb in among the crowding wheels.

"By George, Helen!" said the man uneasily, "I believe the little chap is lost."

"Perhaps," said the woman indifferently.

"It's a shame!"

"There are many lost dogs in a city, I fancy."

"Yes, but there's the pound man, too. Poor chaps, they're out of luck here and no mistake."

The whistle of the traffic-cop cut sharp above the din and the grey racer slowed and stopped. In the moment's wait the man turned his head and looked back.

"By George!" he said again softly, "he's coming, Helen. Sure as the world!"

And he was. Darting here and there, under wheels and hoofs, his streamline head lifted high to keep the grey car in sight—he had discarded scent entirely—the Airedale was coming pathetically fast amid the Juggernauts.

The man tried to wait a bit, but the whistle sounded and the stream behind tooted and he was forced to go on across the section.

Once on the other side he looked back again.

"Be careful, Dick!" the woman cried. "Look where you're going!"

But the man swung into the kerb defiant of the stream.

As the car stopped he rose and searched the maelstrom anxiously.

Instantly he put his finger to his lips and blew a call that cut high above the traffic roar—the unmistakable call of the man to the dog, the veritable secret speech of those who understand.

The Airedale heard it, caught sight of the grey car again and leaped forward with renewed speed. He narrowly dodged a great team's hoofs, skimmed in before a truck, darted between the legs of a very respectable old man with side-whiskers and, with one long, well-calculated leap, landed on the running-board of the grey monster. He looked up once into the man's glowing face, licked the swift hand that he dropped on his head, and settled himself to the business of sticking on as the big car backed and drew out into the tide once more.

"Adopted us, by Jingo!" crowed the man happily. "We're his from this second! We like each other on sight!"

"What in the world will you do with him?" asked the woman coldly.

"Take him along. He's lost his master, that's plain, and he's just what we need on this trip. Makes it perfect."

"Our wedding trip?" she cried aghast. "I thought it was perfect as it was!"

"So it was and is, darling," said the man quickly, "but he's the—the cherry on the cocktail, let's say—the finishing touch, not absolutely necessary, but effective."

It was not until they reached the ferry and were out in the beautiful blue-grey-and-opal runway to the world that lies at the city's fringe, bound for Sausalito, the boulevards and the far mountains to the north, that Dick had a chance to pow-wow with his new friend. Then he looked him over carefully for identification and for blood points as well.

"Perfect specimen," he said admiringly, "without a blemish. Must belong to the Oorang strain. And there isn't a mark on him by which I can find his owners. Too bad, old boy—and yet—how'll I do for a master, eh? Old Fuzzy-Face?"

"Perfectly," said the brown eyes raised to his. "Yes, perfectly," said the streamline head laid quietly in his hand; and "perfectly," said the flag-tail that trembled a bit with the new emotion of sanctuary. The man rubbed the short ears, felt the muscled jaws.

"Fuzzy-Face," he mused, smiling delightedly. "Fuzzy-Face and Frazzle-Tail"—and the dog was named and settled.

"If you'll be comfortable, my dear," he told the little bride, after ensconcing her in a cushioned set upstairs with magazines and flowers, "I'll take the little chap and get him something to eat below."

It was not food so much that the Airedale wanted, though he was lean with hunger, but water. His tongue was dry and his throat hot.

So, when the man obtained a plate of meat at the galley and set it before him, he

accepted it with every sign of gladness, nuzzling it, sniffing at it, but did not eat. Instead he looked up straight into those other brown eyes and waited, wagging his stub tail anxiously. Would the new master understand?

"Eh?" said Dick, surprised, "not hungry?" and he reached down for the plate. But Fuzzy-Face put a tan paw promptly upon it—and waited again.

"What's the matter, old chap?"

The dog could not answer in kind, but he licked his chops and his tongue looked hard and dry.

This new master was a dog's man, and a quick light came in his face.

"Water!" he cried. "Is that it? Here, boy," as a deck-hand passed, "get me a pail of fresh water, quick."

A coin passed and, with the touch of that modern magic, a cool bucket soon made its appearance.

Thirsty? The Airedale spread his legs and fairly slopped the shining liquid in his eagerness.

Ah, then he could eat! He made the titbits fly on that plate and cleaned it to the last sweet morsel. Then with a long breath he looked up once more into the new master's face and fell sedately in at his heel—one pace to the rear, one pace to the right.

Dick watched him as they made their way about the lower deck and never once did he lose that position.

"Blood," he mused, "a born protector. And unless I'm very much mistaken, he's a fighter as well."

The time was to come when the man would see that prophecy fulfilled, but now they stood forward and watched the blue water boiling from the prow as the big ferryboat cut proudly out across the bay. There were other men about and one snapped appreciative fingers at the dog, but he paid him small attention. Not once did Dick have to call him to his new allegiance. They belonged, firmly and simply, had belonged from that first intimate glance at the kerb's edge.

It was a long trip across and the man must go up to where the one girl in the world read her magazines, so he put the dog in the car with a quiet command and left him there.

From the distant companionway he looked back to see the tawny face turned toward him.

The magazines seemed very engrossing and Helen greeted him absently. But Dick was one of the world's sweet-hearted, always pleased with the sunlight and the winds and waters, so he lay back on the cushions and watched a full-rigged ship sailing majestically out toward the illimitable sea.

At the farther dock the boulevards that lay like ribbons flung across the smiling country took them and the grey car and lured them north. There was a deal of power underneath the monster's hood and soon the sweet winds were blowing in their faces from the miles of blue flowers on either side.

They were young and very much in love and they were on their wedding journey. What more could a mortal ask? Dick took off his visored cap and drove with the sun on his fair hair; and he also opened his lips and sang in a very creditable tenor.

He was so happy that there seemed no care anywhere in all the earth. But Helen cast a side-glance at the grey dog sitting so sedately on the wide running-board, and it was venomous, if one might use so harsh a word in connection with one so small and beautiful.

¶

NORTH again they swept, past towns and along the deep river; and the great valley of the Sacramento narrowed its majestic sweep, with the mountains marching in on either side.

For a little while they hugged the river, narrowed, too, and grown vastly clearer, more swift; and then they began to climb into the virgin hills. Up and over the Shasta Divide they went and, finally, into the enchanted country of the Trinities.

Ah, the Trinities! Still, hushed, waiting, cool with the winds from their eternal snows, sweet with the rush of waters. Deer watched them from hidden nooks on the vast slopes, and strange flowers bloomed on the mountain's breast that rose within hand's reach beyond the cut-out roads. On the outer edges of these same roads there was a foot to spare beyond the monster's wheels with a thousand feet of sheerest depths below. The woman shuddered and cowered close to the man, but he only laughed and steered the roaring bolt unerringly up the dizzy way.

When they had reached Minersville they left the long, grey car—safe, covered and shut in a big corral—and hired four horses from the ranch. On the two pack-horses Dick packed his duffle and supplies, and the fact that he could throw a diamond-hitch proved him no tenderfoot.

There were many horses here to choose from and, in among the shining lot, there stood one that took his eye: a gleaming sorrel, slim-legged, slim-barrelled, soft-eyed, his thin neck arching, a thoroughbred by every sign; Old Hollywood, long past his prime, but gallant still. And Hollywood Dick must have for Helen. None other should carry the precious burden. At dawn the man and the woman and the grey-coated dog struck up into the deepest wilderness that she had ever seen. The tall pines sang their everlasting song and the winds were sweet with resin. The mountains closed them in on every hand—oh, lovely Trinities! To Dick this was a paradise. He was a man in every sense and loved the virile like the aborigine, who must meet it for his very life.

But to Helen, so bravely seconding his choice of a wilderness honeymoon, it was an appalling land of fear. Fear had faced her from the hazardous roads hung on the mountains, from the dashing streams and from the silence of the eternal forests. It faced her now as they left civilisation farther and farther behind.

She said no word of this, for she was built of good material at heart, but a little white line came about her lips and the pupils of her eyes dilated slightly.

She sat in her saddle, easy with old Hollywood's soft shuffle-step, and followed up and up and ever up. Dick had been here before and he knew where he was going. Great rugged slopes and slants began to face them and the stupendous grandeur of the country awed the woman.

"My Lord!" she whispered to herself, aghast, "he has planned so much on bringing in a deer. And—and I'll—have to stay in camp! I know it! Oh, these cold heights—and the long shadows are already coming down the slants!"

She was right. They were.

"Look! Just look, honey!" cried Dick in a sort of rapture. "Distance and height and silence and the jumbled peaks! Old California can give you anything, from shore and desert to this! Some state, I'll say—some grand old state!"

But, if the austere peaks were awesome, they could be wondrous, too; and she found for the first time in her life the enchantment of a fire high in the pines at night, of the sound of singing waters on the slopes, of a bed spread on high-piled fir boughs correctly spread with their curved tips together. Her man was of the open and proved it by his keen efficiency. He had come "packed light," and had little to do with, but she marvelled that that little was all-sufficient. They made their permanent camp high on a plateau beside a splendid spring, where a group of spreading fir trees made shade and shelter. A tiny light tent went up with their duffle bags inside, some folding stools came from the packs, some saplings cut with the small hand-axe and neatly built together made table and settee, and the place was charming with its undying fire in the centre. Dick tethered one horse and turned the others loose with hobbles and got out his precious gun.

"Now," he said, smiling across at the adorable little figure in its shirt and riding breeches, "we're at home—in Paradise."

Helen smiled back, for she was happy so long as she did not look ahead, and she was trying her best to fry bacon without burning it. She was appalled at the length of time it took to make the coffee boil.

"So high, honey," said the man; "it's the altitude."

Sunrise on the peaks was a celestial pageant.

Have you ever slept on a mountain top and wakened with the light? Then you know the utter enchantment of it, the hush that is a promise, the coolness, the exhilaration.

Dick stood on his plateau and smiled vacantly at the dark cañons still filled with blue-green shadow, at the gilded edges of the distant ridge, and at his feet sat Fuzzy-Face gravely inspecting the world. Fuzzy-Face was happy, too. Very happy. From time to time he looked up in his new master's face with wise, brown eyes that adored him openly. He was a contained dog, not given to demonstration of affection, but once in a while he leaned his slug-head and kissed the hand that hung at the master's side and the touch was eloquent.

So the peaks were Paradise indeed to these two; but they were dark with menace to the woman. She could not know the challenge which they gave the males,

therefore she was afraid of them. All that first day the man and the dog stayed at the camp, but with the dusk Dick's eyes would turn eagerly toward the farther slopes. He knew the deer were feeding there, and so did Fuzzy-Face. Next day he could wait no longer.

His gun was oiled and ready and Fuzzy-Face sat at the camp's edge, with his keen eyes on the master's face, waiting.

"Now, honey," said Dick, as he kissed the little bride, "there's my automatic and, if you want me for anything, just fire three times and I'll come. I won't be far away, anyhow, just across on the other slope." Then he was gone, with a wave of his hand, and the great land had her alone in its grip. She looked about the camp with dilated eyes and gripped her small hands at her sides.

However, she was not minded to be a coward, so she went about some little work and tried not to be afraid. But always she kept seeing Dick striding away and at his heels the grey dog.

The jealous dislike she had felt that first day on Market Street was turning into sharp hatred for the interloper. Why should she have a rival on her wedding journey, even though it was a dog?

She resented the tacit understanding in which she had no part. But Dick was happy—and so was Fuzzy-Face. This land seemed old to him, though why, he did not know. In reality it was because his forbears belonged here, though his father and himself had travelled far, even to the distant north. All this was dim to Fuzzy-Face; he only *felt* at home in the Trinities, and was happy.

Dick was gone four hours and, to Helen, they were an eternity of frightfulness. She sat upright on the settee, holding her breath and listening, for long intervals. She went about the camp with a careful step, as if there might be ears to hear in the thickets below. And once, far over on the other slope, she heard a shot.

With the decline of the sun towards the West, Dick came tramping happily back, his flannel shirt open at the neck, the sun on his fair hair. He looked like a young god in his virility and his strength, and Helen thrilled with joy in her possession of him.

His first words added to the thrill, for they were in appreciation of herself.

"Some little brick, kiddo," he told her admiringly, "to stay alone so long. 'Fraid?"

"Not a bit," she lied, smiling. "See any deer?"

"You bet I did. Found where a big buck beds, over on the other slope, but didn't see him. Got one shot at a spike, but to-morrow I'm going after the big boy."

He kissed her and went to wash his hands at the spring.

"And say, say man! But I've got a dog at last! I just wish you could have seen the little chap work! He's a perfect heeler and waits my word like a veteran. I gave him the spike's fresh track and he took down the gulch without a sound, and it wasn't ten minutes until he gave one short yelp—no more, not another word after—and presently I saw the little buck go out below, across an opening. I got one shot, but he was too quick for me and, when I saw he was going to get away, I whistled once—just once—and Fuzzy-Face stopped in the middle of the opening. Stopped so short he nearly turned a somersault. Humped your old back like a camel, didn't you, old Frazzle-Tail?" He leaned to rub soapy hands over the short ears. "Some dog! Some little ol' dog! I'll say you are!"

Helen's soft mouth hardened as she bent to pull a frying-pan off the fire. She looked at the dog under lowered lids and Fuzzy-Face looked back. Instantly the brown orbs that had been shining at the master's praise and touch sobered and the dog went sedately and laid down at the camp's edge. Always at the camp's edge. It seemed that was his place; as if, from long lines of ancestors, he had inherited it.

Dick noticed the habit and, with the innocent tactlessness of the happy and good-intentioned, he struck upon it for further eulogy.

"See," he said, as he rubbed his sunburned face with a coarse towel, "how he always lies out? That's blood. The place of the protector, nearest possible danger with his charges behind. The collie has it, this instinct, and one or two other breeds. The Airedale is a made breed, you know, and has had the best traits of several of his crossed strains carefully fostered. This fearlessness and faithfulness comes from much thought on the part of many intelligent gentlemen in England, where the breed was perfected.

"I'll bet someone is sorry for this chap's loss and, if I could, I'd locate the rightful

owner. He has had training in a deer country, I can see that."

"Come," said Helen shortly; "dinner is served."

Dinner—light bread made in a dutch-oven and bacon with potatoes fried in the drip—and the little keen winds drawing up the slopes. The girl could cook—so much for the Higher Education and Domestic Science—and Dick had shown her the tricks of coal-bed and spider, of facing stones and coffee-pot, and he felt now like a king in his domain, with his woman beside him.

That was a wonderful night, with the big, cool stars hanging close in a blue-black sky, with the little wind singing in the pine-tops. For a long while they lay close on their springy pine-bough bed and talked of a thousand things—the first magic moment of their meeting, the subsequent times, and of how they were to meet and marry, from time immemorial.

Presently Helen drifted away to the murmur of the pine-tops and dreamed of the city on the bay below.

Dick had no dreams. He was tired, with that delightful fatigue of the traveller in the big hills which flexes every muscle, and slept like the dead.

¶

THERE was one, however, who did not sleep so, who lay out at the camp's edge and drowsed and waked and drowsed again: Fuzzy-Face listening with short ears cocked to the stealthy sounds of night. He heard the owl and its mate who answered, knew when they floated away together on silent wings of death for some hapless, small creature. He listened in quiet contempt to the racket of the coyotes. He heard a little animal scream far down the slope and scream again until the screams were suddenly stopped by cruel beak or fang. He hunched himself into a tighter ball, for the night cold dropped on the mountain like a blanket, and drew his feet together with his whiskered nose among them. He had, alas! no long tail with which to cover them, as old Dame Nature meant in the beginning. Man, who had given him his bristled saddle, with its wonderful, thick, grey underpack beneath, had ruthlessly chopped it off. However, he had man to thank for the amazingly powerful jaws hidden so unostentatiously under the tawny whiskers, the heart, bred patiently up from a long line's best, that held no fear of anything, for the blind joy in combat that brought him and his kind back into the battle when they had been whipped to a standstill and did not know it. For that one gift alone Fuzzy-Face should have worshipped man, which he did unconsciously, tail or no tail. He was a fighter born, unconquered because he did not understand defeat. There had been one or two times—that day on the Saskatchewan, when he had met the huge Siberian Malamute because his master had pitted him in a pen; and the night alone in the wilderness after the month-long vigil beside that same master who fell on the trail and never arose, when he fought the timber wolf for supremacy.

Some time after midnight, when a little soft sickle of a moon hung low in the west, he came abruptly awake in every nerve and fibre. He did not make a single move, save to open his eyes and lift his short ears to the sharpest angle of acute efficiency.

For a long time Fuzzy-Face breathed and listened. Then, as silently as a cat, he rose to his feet and stepped away toward the shadows. But whatever had been there was quicker, more silent than he. It was a long time before the dog came back to the camp's edge—in fact, not until the dawn was coming up the eastern sky—and when he did he knew several things that would have considerably surprised Dick.

That morning, Helen was in an unpleasant mood. The mountain-top was decidedly cold and, for some reason, it took a long time for the fire to burn well. She frowned as she helped Dick with the little work of breakfast and tidying up and it seemed to her the grey dog, huddled into an unobtrusive ball, was directly in the way wherever she turned. Once she gave him a vicious little kick and Fuzzy-Face looked at her with his grave eyes in a way that she did not understand. It was as if he stood pat, like a gentleman, for that indignity and would stand for more, but that there was a point beyond which they had best not go. Blue eyes and brown gave challenge and accepted it.

"Dick," the girl cried impetuously, "I don't like that dog! He'd take one down."

"Yes," answered the man very quietly, "I think he would—if one abused him without reason."

"You mean?" she flashed.

"My dear," said Dick gently, "I saw that little play."

Helen turned away, flushed and with trembling lips.

"It seems to me you are a strange bridegroom," she said bitterly, "to favour a *dog*"—there was scorn ineffable in the word—"against your wife."

Instantly Dick was beside her, his loving arms about her.

"There can be no such question between us," he told her, "no such comparison. But I want my wife to be just—even to a dog."

That day he stayed in camp, read aloud from the books they had brought, looked after the horses and told her long tales of the wild land, so that the frowns smoothed out of the pretty brow and the petulant droop lifted from the corners of the curved mouth.

But the next day was different. It called to the hunter's instinct in every little breeze, in every still thicket, in each cool ravine shadowed at noon; and Dick presently took his gun and dog after the ancient fashion of the provider and went down the slopes. He was bound for the farther slants, where he had found the big buck's bed.

"Fuzzy-Face," he said to the grey dog, "we'll just work that hillside for all it's worth."

He worked down the frequent short gulches and here Fuzzy-Face proved his training, for he obeyed like a veteran when Dick commanded him by word and gesture to the gulch's head.

From the second gulch he started a band and Dick snapped up his gun, but dropped it again, for they were two old does with three yearlings.

"No sporting chance, old boy," he said whimsically. "We don't make war on ladies. Only the big boys, who are a lot more cunning than we are. And I think we're working too low at that," he added, glancing up toward the towering peaks, "for they're most likely up yonder, sunning their horns in the velvet. They're mostly rubbed by now, but still tender. Let's go up."

So he climbed and grinned to himself in pure delight; and here we leave him, for the story must turn back to Helen. Helen, half-sullen, disgusted with the world in general, trying to read the exhausted magazines and scowling across the great space between the mountains where her lord and master preferred to tramp, while she, a bride on her wedding trip, endured the loneliness of the solitary camp. She felt resentful and the mood produced a sort of courage which prompted her to put on her cap and, for the first time, go on a little exploring trip outside the confines of the camp. The tall pines were singing their everlasting diapason and the shadows of high clouds trailed across the slants with witchery.

Strange, glowing flowers grew here and there and she saw a huge birds' nest high in a sugar pine. She also heard the sharp racket of a rattle-snake, but did not recognise it, going placidly on about her pleasant business. She was wise, however, and kept the camp always in sight by turning from time to time to get and keep her bearings. She dropped down across a sharply tilted glade, found some beautiful red blooms beside a spring, sat for a while on a great flat rock that overlooked the sheer depths and watched a blue heron sailing along the stream below Then she slipped off the rock and started back, though by a different route.

She would go a little farther down and come up to camp from the other side. She swung her red flowers by their long stems and, being in a better temper by reason of the soothing hand of Nature laid majestically on her by the solitude, she sang in a high soprano voice, very sweet and piercing. She chose the aria from the Rigoletto quartette, for it alone seemed big enough with which to salute the utter silence. And, far down below the thicket that flanked the camp on the lower side, a round flat head raised itself from the tawny paws on which it had been resting and listened with blunt ears well forward. Two cruel, yellow eyes in the broad, cat face widened slowly, long whiskers twitched and a low sniffing growl sent the two kittens, rolling in the sun, scuttling instantly into the low mouthed cave beneath a two-ton stone.

Old Tawny Sides, for years the undisputed queen of this particular ridge, backed carefully away to flatten her long, gaunt body in the speckled shade.

And Helen, singing like a siren, came slowly upward along the slope.

At precisely this moment something happened across the broad gulch—something which brought an oath to Dick's lips, a look of astonishment to his face. For Fuzzy-Face had stopped in his tracks, his slug-head well up in the little wind that

was drawing up to them, his every hackle rising until the fringe of whisker under his ears and just above his collar stood ridiculously out like a ruff. Dick had commanded him forward to work a patch of brush and, for the first time, the dog had paid no more attention than as if he had not spoken.

For a moment the man watched him.

"Old Timer," he said at last, solemnly, "I hope I've not been mistaken. Are you going to resign—after such perfect work?"

But Fuzzy-Face was not even listening to him. His brown eyes were dilated, his nostrils were pinched close in a keen effort to get the last word from that little wind, his whole tense body was straining at something beyond the human ken. He was harking back to that thicket below the camp and what he knew about it.

He did not like the woman who presided over it, but an instinct old as his blood itself and followed in honour by more than one of his ancestors, even unto death, was pulling him back towards it with a sudden vital clutch.

For another second, Fuzzy-Face stood like a stone and quested of the air, of that strange inner instinct which warns the dumb creation of danger. Then, without a look at the man regarding him in pained surprise, he leaped forward.

Straight as a long grey bolt he went down the slope, doubling and straightening, directly towards that distant camp.

Dick watched him sail away in that straining run.

"Well—I'll—be—damned!" he said.

Across the great hollow, Helen went on, swinging her flowers, sublimely unconscious. Under the stone below the thicket the two little kittens cowered in round-eyed silence. Beneath the manzanita bush old Tawny Sides stretched and flattened and the lips above her terrible fangs drew back and shook like a cat's—for the woman was coming straight towards her den.

Old Tawny Sides was Death Incarnate to the ridge country.

For years uncounted she had killed ruthlessly, mostly to feed herself and the kittens that each spring opened their eyes under the big stone, but many times for the pure fun of the thing.

For Tawny Sides was an old panther, lean and ugly and as cruel as only her kind can be. She had never come into contact with humans; was afraid of the few she had seen in her domain, in fact; but when a human neared that place of her young—ah, that was a different matter.

It took some time for the girl to come up along the slope.

She had dropped farther down than she had intended and she was tired, too. Therefore, she stopped and rested, wondered where Dick was and how late it was getting to be. She looked at the sun, but was no judge. Then she went on, more slowly, but still advertising her whereabouts by the joyous song. She felt better, more in tune with the world, was sorry she had been so sharp with Dick about the dog. She hated the dog—yes, there was no getting around that—and always would. He seemed so smug, so dignified, somehow, as if he were a better individual of his type and species than she was of hers. Again she rested and went on.

The camp was not so far away now and she was very glad. Just up beyond the thicket. But she was certainly tired. There was a broad flat stone yonder—good place to rest. She would sit upon it and watch for Dick awhile. Thinking thus, she went forward, climbing up the slope, directly toward the gleaming yellow eyes that had never looked more cruel in their life, the long body that tensed and waited, the long tail lashing slowly.

"Whe-ew!" she said aloud, "I didn't think it was so warm. Oh, Lord God!" For, as she raised her eyes toward the manzanita bush the speckled shadows rose from under it with grotesque unreality and lifted high in the air. She saw the long body sail up and out toward her, the awful paws spread, the head curved on its arching neck, the mouth open and unspeakable with its snarl.

Helen was of the cities, carefully nurtured, delicately shielded, but she knew in that one second what this was and what it meant, there on the lonely hillside. She had one sickening flash of Dick—and her mangled form. . . . And just in that one awful second, which seemed long as eternity, something shot up almost from under her arm, shot up like a long grey bolt, its own jaws wide open, its slug-head out-thrust, to meet the tawny thing three feet above the ground and to fall with it—but with those rows of teeth well back, set together like a vice on the panther's throat!

It was Fuzzy-Face, the faithful. Fuzzy-Face, who had never met a panther cat

before, but whose stout heart sent him up and under, unfailingly, with the only grip possible. He did not know that once, long back, in those very North California hills, a great grandfather had made his mark in the world by just that undergrip, that fearless rage, had saved another woman's life, a woman whom he loved. . . . That had been a wonderful dog, whose blood was in the land ; and now Fuzzy-Face bred true to it. He did not know all this as he met old Tawny Sides and he did not love this woman, but he was a born protector and this was his master's possession. Therefore he closed his eyes and twisted his slug-head and, the instant his feet touched ground, he scratched backward for his life and more than that.

And then pandemonium broke loose upon the hillside. There was one bounding, flying tangle of twisting tawny body, of lashing tail, of a grey shape that whirled and flew with the great cat's struggles, but which tried always to keep *out* and *back* from the crawling hind feet that reached and tore for its vitals.

For a terrible time Helen stood and tried to get the breath back into her lungs.

Into the manzanita bush the flying tangle rolled, then out and over and over down the slope. There was no sound from the grey dog, not a breath, not a snarl. He was silent as he was always But the sounds that came from the panther's closing throat were indescribable. They filled the woman's lungs with a fog of fear. Then, suddenly, she seemed to waken to the tragedy of the moment. She saw those crawling feet with the cruel claws, she felt the great cat's superiority of bulk, its terrible sinuous strength. The dog seemed very small as he circled and sailed with the whip of the battle. And she realised again suddenly that the fight could have but one end. Surely as the sun was going down those crawling feet would find their mark—the grey dog's belly—and the gallant fighter would be done for.

It is to Helen's credit that in that moment of realisation she had no selfish thought of herself ; she could not bear that that game little chap should lose so pitifully. And with this realisation came inspiration.

The automatic ! In the camp above !

Like a frightened doe the girl darted up the slope.

It was but a matter of moments, though it seemed ages to her, before she was running down below the manzanita bush again to where the battle still raged, the big blue gun stretched out before her. Here and there the bundle thrashed. Here and there she flashed herself, her eyes black with fright, her trembling held down by her own heart, which was proving itself good stuff, watching for a chance to fire. In she went, closer and closer. Once the grey body brushed her knee and the panther's long tail struck her like a flail. Here—there—down the hill and over to the right—she fell over a rock, but was up and in again—and then—just for a terrible moment the panther's long body stretched out, with the dingy white breast and stomach uppermost. Like a flash of light the girl ran in—so close she could smell the sickening scent of the wild fur—stuck the muzzle of the gun against the left side of that yellow body and fired.

The bullet from the big automatic went precisely through the pounding heart inside —and old Tawny Sides' murders were done.

There was a long straightening out of the crawling legs, a sighing finish of the whistling breath—and the battle was over.

Like one in a daze, Helen stood and held the smoking gun, her other hand at her throat. But it was a long time before Fuzzy-Face let go his hold on the lean neck—not until the last quiver had subsided

Upon this scene came Dick, red from running, aghast at the spectacle.

" Helen ! " he cried in an agony of fear but the girl pointed at the dog.

" Speak to—him—first," she said thickly, " he's all you said—and more—the born protector—the faithful——" Then the world faded out and she crumpled down where she stood, the automatic tumbling among the trampled bushes.

" Both," said Dick, with a sob in his voice, " the gamest two on earth ! "

Old Hollywood, being the only horse that would pack them, carried back to Minersville old Tawny Sides and her two kittens, for Dick had ruthlessly dug them out and killed them. " It will save a hundred fawns in the future," he told Helen, who feebly protested—and when the long car again took the boulevards it carried on the running-board a sedate, grey dog who rode still beside the master ; for, though the woman's heart was full of humble devotion and firm friendship, he was a man's dog entirely and would always be.

The Tragedy at Brookbend Cottage

An amazing scheme and its brilliant detection

By ERNEST BRAMAH

"MAX," said Mr. Carlyle, when Parkinson had closed the door behind him, "this is Lieutenant Hollyer, whom you consented to see."

"To hear," corrected Carrados, smiling straight into the healthy and rather embarrassed face of the stranger before him. "Mr. Hollyer knows of my disability?"

"Mr. Carlyle told me," said the young man, "but, as a matter of fact, I had heard of you before, Mr. Carrados, from one of our men. It was in connection with the foundering of the *Ivan Saratov*."

Carrados wagged his head in good-humoured resignation.

"And the owners were sworn to inviolable secrecy!" he exclaimed. "Well, it is inevitable, I suppose. Not another scuttling case, Mr. Hollyer?"

"No, mine is quite a private matter," replied the lieutenant. "My sister, Mrs. Creake—but Mr. Carlyle would tell you better than I can. He knows all about it."

"No, no; Carlyle is a professional. Let me have it in the rough, Mr. Hollyer. My ears are my eyes, you know."

"Very well, sir. I can tell you what there is to tell, right enough, but I feel that when all's said and done it must sound very little to another, although it seems important to me."

"We have occasionally found trifles of significance ourselves," said Carrados encouragingly. "Don't let that deter you."

This was the essence of Lieutenant Hollyer's narrative:

"I have a sister, Millicent, who is married to a man called Creake. She is about twenty-eight now and he is at least fifteen years older. Neither my mother (who has since died) nor I cared very much about Creake. We had nothing particular against him, except, perhaps, the moderate disparity of age, but none of us appeared to have anything in common. He was a dark, taciturn man, and his moody silence froze up conversation. As a result, of course, we didn't see much of each other."

"This, you must understand, was four or five years ago, Max," interposed Mr. Carlyle officiously.

Carrados maintained an uncompromising silence. Mr. Carlyle blew his nose and contrived to impart a hurt significance into the operation. Then Lieutenant Hollyer continued:

"Millicent married Creake after a very short engagement. It was a frightfully subdued wedding—more like a funeral to me. The man professed to have no relations and apparently he had scarcely any friends or business acquaintances. He was an agent for something or other and had an office off Holborn. I suppose he made a living out of it then, although we knew practically nothing of his private affairs, but I gather that it has been going down since, and I suspect that for the past few years they have been getting along almost entirely on Millicent's little income. You would like the particulars of that?"

"Please," assented Carrados.

"When our father died about seven years ago, he left three thousand pounds. It was invested in Canadian stock and brought in a little over a hundred a year. By his will my mother was to have the income of that for life and on her death it was to pass to Millicent, subject to the payment of a lump sum of five hundred pounds to me. But my father privately suggested to me that if I should have no particular use for the money at the time, he would propose my letting Millicent have the income of it until I did want it, as she would not be particularly well off. You see, Mr. Carrados, a great

deal more had been spent on my education and advancement than on her; I had my pay and, of course, I could look out for myself better than a girl could."

"Quite so," agreed Carrados.

"Therefore I did nothing about that," continued the lieutenant. "Three years ago I was over again but I did not see much of them. They were living in lodgings. That was the only time since the marriage that I have seen them until last week. In the meanwhile our mother had died and Millicent had been receiving her income. She wrote me several letters at the time. Otherwise we did not correspond much, but about a year ago she sent me their new address — Brookbend Cottage, Mulling Common—a house that they had taken. When I got two months' leave I invited myself there as a matter of course, fully expecting to stay most of my time with them, but I made an excuse to get away after a week. The place was dismal and unendurable, the whole life and atmosphere indescribably depressing." He looked round with an instinct of caution, leaned forward earnestly, and dropped his voice. "Mr. Carrados, it is my absolute conviction that Creake is only waiting for a favourable opportunity to murder Millicent."

"Go on," said Carrados quietly. "A week of the depressing surroundings of Brookbend Cottage would not alone convince you of that, Mr. Hollyer."

"I am not so sure," declared Hollyer doubtfully. "There was a feeling of suspicion and—before me—polite hatred that would have gone a good way towards it. All the same there *was* something more definite. Millicent told me this the day after I went there. There is no doubt that a few months ago Creake deliberately planned to poison her with some weed-killer. She told me the circumstances in a rather distressed moment, but afterwards she refused to speak of it again—even weakly denied it—and, as a matter of fact, it was with the greatest difficulty that I could get her at any time to talk about her husband or his affairs. The gist of it was that she had the strongest suspicion that Creake doctored a bottle of stout which he expected she would drink for her supper when she was alone. The weed-killer, properly labelled, but also in a beer bottle, was kept with other miscellaneous liquids in the same cupboard as the beer but on a high shelf. When he found that it had miscarried he poured away the mixture, washed out the bottle and put in the dregs from another. There is no doubt in my mind that if he had come back and found Millicent dead or dying he would have contrived it to appear that she had made a mistake in the dark and drunk some of the poison before she found out."

"Yes," assented Carrados. "The open way; the safe way."

"You must understand that they live in a very small style, Mr. Carrados, and Millicent is almost entirely in the man's power. The only servant they have is a woman who comes in for a few hours every day. The house is lonely and secluded. Creake is sometimes away for days and nights at a time, and Millicent, either through pride or indifference, seems to have dropped off all her old friends and to have made no others. He might poison her, bury the body in the garden, and be a thousand miles away before any one began even to inquire about her. What am I to do, Mr. Carrados?"

"He is less likely to try poison than some other means now," pondered Carrados. "That having failed, his wife will always be on her guard. He may know, or at least suspect, that others know. No . . . The common-sense precaution would be for your sister to leave the man, Mr. Hollyer. She will not?"

"No," admitted Hollyer, "she will not. I at once urged that." The young man struggled with some hesitation for a moment and then blurted out: "The fact is, Mr. Carrados, I don't understand Millicent. She is not the girl she was. She hates Creake and treats him with a silent contempt that eats into their lives like acid, and yet she is so jealous of him that she will let nothing short of death part them. It is a horrible life they lead. I stood it for a week and I must say, much as I dislike my brother-in-law, that he has something to put up with. If only he got into a passion like a man and killed her it wouldn't be altogether incomprehensible."

"That does not concern us," said Carrados. "In a game of this kind one has to take sides and we have taken ours. It remains for us to see that our side wins. You mentioned jealousy, Mr. Hollyer. Have you any idea whether Mrs. Creake has real ground for it?"

"I should have told you that," replied Lieutenant Hollyer. "I happened to strike up with a newspaper man whose office is in the same block as Creake's. When I

mentioned the name he grinned. 'Creake,' he said, 'oh, he's the man with the romantic typist, isn't he?' 'Well, he's my brother-in-law,' I replied. 'What about the typist?' Then the chap shut up like a knife. 'No, no,' he said, 'I didn't know he was married. I don't want to get mixed up in anything of that sort. I only said that he had a typist. Well, what of that? So have we; so has every one.' There was nothing more to be got out of him, but the remark and the grin meant—well, about as usual, Mr. Carrados."

Carrados turned to his friend.

"I suppose you know all about the typist by now, Louis?"

"We have had her under efficient observation, Max," replied Mr. Carlyle, with severe dignity.

"Is she unmarried?"

"Yes; so far as ordinary repute goes, she is."

"That is all that is essential for the moment. Mr. Hollyer opens up three excellent reasons why this man might wish to dispose of his wife. If we accept the suggestion of poisoning—though we have only a jealous woman's suspicion for it—we add to the wish the determination. Well, we will go forward on that. Have you got a photograph of Mr. Creake?"

The lieutenant took out his pocket-book.

"Mr. Carlyle asked me for one. Here is the best I could get."

Carrados rang the bell.

"This, Parkinson," he said, when the man appeared, "is a photograph of a Mr. —— What first name, by the way?"

"Austin," put in Hollyer, who was following everything with a boyish mixture of excitement and subdued importance.

"—of a Mr. Austin Creake. I may require you to recognise him."

Parkinson glanced at the print and returned it to his master's hand.

"May I inquire if it is a recent photograph of the gentleman, sir?" he asked.

"About six years ago," said the lieutenant, taking in this new actor in the drama with frank curiosity. "But he is very little changed."

"Thank you, sir. I will endeavour to remember Mr. Creake, sir."

Lieutenant Hollyer stood up as Parkinson left the room. The interview seemed to be at an end.

"Oh, there's one other matter," he remarked. "I am afraid that I did rather an unfortunate thing while I was at Brookbend. It seemed to me that as all Millicent's money would probably pass into Creake's hands sooner or later I might as well have my five hundred pounds, if only to help her with afterwards. So I broached the subject and said that I should like to have it now as I had an opportunity for investing."

"And you think?"

"It may possibly influence Creake to act sooner than he otherwise might have done. He may have got possession of the principal even and find it very awkward to replace it."

"So much the better. If your sister is going to be murdered it may as well be done next week as next year so far as I am concerned. Excuse my brutality, Mr. Hollyer, but this is simply a case to me and I regard it strategically. Now Mr. Carlyle's organisation can look after Mrs. Creake for a few weeks, but it cannot look after her for ever. By increasing the immediate risk we diminish the permanent risk."

"I see," agreed Hollyer. "I'm awfully uneasy but I'm entirely in your hands."

"Then we will give Mr. Creake every inducement and every opportunity to get to work. Where are you staying now?"

"Just now with some friends at St. Albans."

"That is too far." The inscrutable eyes retained their tranquil depth but a new quality of quickening interest in the voice made Mr. Carlyle forget the weight and burden of his ruffled dignity. "Give me a few minutes, please. The cigarettes are behind you, Mr. Hollyer." The blind man walked to the window and seemed to look out over the cypress-shaded lawn. The lieutenant lit a cigarette and Mr. Carlyle picked up *Punch*. Then Carrados turned round again.

"You are prepared to put your own arrangements aside?" he demanded of his visitor.

"Certainly."

"Very well. I want you to go down now — straight from here — to Brookbend Cottage. Tell your sister that your leave is unexpectedly cut short and that you sail to-morrow."

"The *Martian*?"

"No, no; the *Martian* doesn't sail. Look up the movements on your way there and pick out a boat that does. Say you are transferred. Add that you expect to be away only two or three months and that you really want the five hundred pounds by the

time of your return. Don't stay in the house long, please."

"I understand, sir."

"St. Albans is too far. Make your excuse and get away from there to-day. Put up somewhere in town, where you will be in reach of the telephone. Let Mr. Carlyle and myself know where you are. Keep out of Creake's way. I don't want actually to tie you down to the house, but we may require your services. We will let you know at the first sign of anything doing and if there is nothing to be done we must release you."

"I don't mind that. Is there nothing more that I can do now?"

"Nothing. In going to Mr. Carlyle you have done the best thing possible; you have put you sister into the care of the shrewdest man in London." Whereat the object of this quite unexpected eulogy found himself becoming covered with modest confusion.

"Well, Max?" remarked Mr. Carlyle tentatively when they were alone.

"Well, Louis?"

"Of course, it wasn't worth while rubbing it in before young Hollyer, but, as a matter of fact, every single man carries the life of any other man—only one, mind you—in his hands, do what you will."

"Provided he doesn't bungle," acquiesced Carrados.

"Quite so."

"And also that he is absolutely reckless of the consequences."

"Of course."

"Two rather large provisoes. Creake is obviously susceptible to both. Have you seen him?"

"No. As I told you, I put a man on to report his habits in town. Then, two days ago, as the case seemed to promise some interest—for he certainly is deeply involved with the typist, Max, and the thing might take a sensational turn at any time—I went down to Mulling Common myself. Although the house is lonely it is on the electric tram route. You know the sort of market garden rurality that, about a dozen miles out of London, offers — alternate bricks and cabbages. It was easy enough to get to know about Creake locally. He mixes with no one there, goes into town at irregular times but generally every day, and is reputed to be devilish hard to get money out of. Finally, I made the acquaintance of an old fellow who used to do a day's gardening at Brookbend occasionally. He has a cottage and a garden of his own with a greenhouse, and the business cost me the price of a pound of tomatoes."

"Was it—a profitable investment?"

"As tomatoes, yes; as information, no. The old fellow had the fatal disadvantage from our point of view of labouring under a grievance. A few weeks ago Creake told him that he would not require him again as he was going to do his own gardening in future."

"That is something, Louis."

"If only Creake was going to poison his wife with hyoscyamine and bury her, instead of blowing her up with a dynamite cartridge and claiming that it came in among the coal."

"True, true. Still——"

"However, the chatty old soul had a simple explanation for everything that Creake did. Creake was mad. He had even seen him flying a kite in his garden where it was bound to get wrecked among the trees. A lad of ten would have known better, he declared. And certainly the kite did get wrecked, for I saw it hanging over the road myself. But that a sane man should spend his time 'playing with a toy' was beyond him."

"A good many men have been flying kites of various kinds lately," said Carrados. "Is he interested in aviation?"

"I dare say. He appears to have some knowledge of scientific subjects. Now what do you want me to do, Max?"

"Will you do it?"

"Implicitly—subject to the usual reservations."

"Keep your man on Creake in town and let me have his reports after you have seen them. Lunch with me here now. 'Phone up to your office that you are detained on unpleasant business and then give the deserving Parkinson an afternoon off by looking after me while we take a motor run round Mulling Common. If we have time we might go on to Brighton, feed at the 'Ship,' and come back in the cool."

"Amiable and thrice lucky mortal," signed Mr. Carlyle, his glance wandering round the room.

But, as it happened, Brighton did not figure in that day's itinerary. It had been Carrados's intention merely to pass Brookbend Cottage on this occasion, relying on his highly developed faculties, aided by Mr. Carlyle's description, to inform him of the surroundings. A hundred yards before they reached the house he had given an order to his chauffeur to drop into the lowest speed

and they were leisurely drawing past when a discovery by Mr. Carlyle modified their plans.

"By Jupiter!" that gentleman suddenly exclaimed, "there's a board up, Max, The place is to be let."

Carrados picked up the tube again. A couple of sentences passed and the car stopped by the roadside, a score of paces past the limit of the garden. Mr. Carlyle took out his note-book and wrote down the address of a firm of house agents.

"You might raise the bonnet and have a look at the engines, Harris," said Carrados. "We want to be occupied here for a few minutes."

"This is sudden; Hollyer knew nothing of their leaving," remarked Mr. Carlyle.

"Probably not for three months yet. All the same, Louis, we will go on to the agents and get a card to view whether we use it to-day or not."

A thick hedge, in its summer dress effectively screening the house beyond from public view, lay between the garden and the road. Above the hedge showed an occasional shrub; at the corner nearest to the car a chestnut flourished. The wooden gate, once white, which they had passed, was grimed and rickety. The road itself was still the unpretentious country lane that the advent of the electric car had found it. When Carrados had taken in these details there seemed little else to notice. He was on the point of giving Harris the order to go on when his ear caught a trivial sound.

"Some one is coming out of the house, Louis," he warned his friend. "It may be Hollyer, but he ought to have gone by this time."

"I don't hear any one," replied the other, but as he spoke a door banged noisily and Mr. Carlyle slipped into another seat and ensconced himself behind a copy of *The Globe*.

"Creake himself," he whispered across the car, as a man appeared at the gate. "Hollyer was right; he is hardly changed. Waiting for a car, I suppose."

But a car very soon swung past them from the direction in which Mr. Creake was looking and it did not interest him. For a minute or two longer he continued to look expectantly along the road. Then he walked slowly up the drive back to the house.

"We will give him five or ten minutes," decided Carrados. "Harris is behaving very naturally."

Before even the shorter period had run out they were repaid. A telegraph-boy cycled leisurely along the road and, leaving his machine at the gate, went up to the cottage. Evidently there was no reply, for in less than a minute he was trundling past them back again. Round the bend an approaching tram clanged its bell noisily and, quickened by the warning sound, Mr. Creake again appeared, this time with a small portmanteau in his hand. With a backward glance he hurried on towards the next stopping-place and, boarding the car as it slackened down, he was carried out of their knowledge.

"Very convenient of Mr. Creake," remarked Carrados, with quiet satisfaction. "We will now get the order and go over the house in his absence. It might be useful to have a look at the wire as well."

"It might, Max," acquiesced Mr. Carlyle a little dryly. "But if it is, as it probably is, in Creake's pocket, how do you propose to get it?"

"By going to the post office, Louis."

"Quite so. Have you ever tried to see a copy of a telegram addressed to some one else?"

"I don't think I have ever had occasion yet," admitted Carrados. "Have you?"

"In one or two cases I have perhaps been an accessory to the act. It is generally a matter either of extreme delicacy or considerable expenditure."

"Then for Hollyer's sake we will hope for the former here." And Mr. Carlyle smiled darkly and hinted that he was content to wait for a friendly revenge.

¶

A LITTLE later, having left the car at the beginning of the straggling High Street, the two men called at the village post office. They had already visited the house agent and obtained an order to view Brookbend Cottage, declining with some difficulty the clerk's persistent offer to accompany them. The reason was soon forthcoming. "As a matter of fact," explained the young man, "the present tenant is under *our* notice to leave."

"Unsatisfactory, eh?" said Carrados, encouragingly.

"He's a corker," admitted the clerk, responding to the friendly tone. "Fifteen months and not a doit of rent have we had. That's why I should have liked——"

" We will make every allowance," replied Carrados.

The post office occupied one side of a stationer's shop. It was not without some inward trepidation that Mr. Carlyle found himself committed to the adventure. Carrados, on the other hand, was the personification of bland unconcern.

" You have just sent a telegram to Brookbend Cottage," he said to the young lady behind the brass-work lattice. " We think it may have come inaccurately and should like a repeat." He took out his purse. " What is the fee ? "

The request was evidently not a common one. " Oh," said the girl uncertainly, " wait a minute, please," She turned to a pile of telegram duplicates behind the desk and ran a doubtful finger along the upper sheets. " I think this is all right. You want it repeated ? "

" Please." Just a tinge of questioning surprise gave point to the courteous tone.

" It will be fourpence. If there is an error the amount will be refunded."

Carrados put down his coin and received his change.

" Will it take long ? " he inquired carelessly, as he pulled on his glove.

" You will most likely get it within a quarter of an hour," she replied.

" Now you've done it," commented Mr. Carlyle, as they walked back to their car. " How do you propose to get that telegram, Max ? "

" Ask for it," was the laconic explanation.

And, stripping the artifice of any elaboration, he simply asked for it and got it. The car, posted at a convenient bend in the road, gave him a warning note as the telegraph-boy approached. Then Carrados took up a convincing attitude with his hand on the gate while Mr. Carlyle lent himself to the semblance of a departing friend. That was the inevitable impression when the boy rode up.

" Creake, Brookbend Cottage ? " inquired Carrados, holding out his hand, and without a second thought the boy gave him the envelope and rode away on the assurance that there would be no reply.

" Some day, my friend," remarked Mr. Carlyle, looking nervously towards the unseen house, " your ingenuity will get you into a tight corner."

" Then my ingenuity must get me out again," was the retort. " Let us have our ' view ' now. The telegram can wait."

An untidy workwoman took their order and left them standing at the door. Presently a lady whom they both knew to be Mrs. Creake appeared.

" You wish to see over the house ? " she said, in a voice that was utterly devoid of any interest. Then, without waiting for a reply, she turned to the nearest door and threw it open.

" This is the drawing-room," she said, standing aside.

They walked into a sparsely furnished, damp-smelling room and made a pretence of looking round, while Mrs. Creake remained silent and aloof.

" The dining-room," she continued, crossing the narrow hall and opening another door.

Mr. Carlyle ventured a genial commonplace in the hope of inducing conversation. The result was not encouraging. Doubtless they would have gone through the house under the same frigid guidance had not Carrados been at fault in a way that Mr. Carlyle had never known him fail before. In crossing the hall he stumbled over a mat and almost fell.

" Pardon my clumsiness," he said to the lady. " I am, unfortunately, quite blind. But," he added, with a smile, to turn off the mishap, " even a blind man must have a house."

The man who had eyes was surprised to see a flood of colour rush into Mrs. Creake's face.

" Blind ! " she exclaimed, " oh, I beg your pardon. Why did you not tell me ? You might have fallen."

" I generally manage fairly well," he replied. " But, of course in a strange house——"

She put her hand on his arm very lightly.

" You must let me guide you, just a little," she said.

The house, without being large, was full of passages and inconvenient turnings. Carrados asked an occasional question and found Mrs. Creake quite amiable without effusion. Mr. Carlyle followed them from room to room in the hope, though scarcely the expectation, of learning something that might be useful.

" This is the last one. It is the largest bedroom," said their guide. Only two of the upper rooms were fully furnished and Mr. Carlyle at once saw, as Carrados knew without seeing, that this was the one which the Creakes occupied.

"A very pleasant outlook," declared Mr. Carlyle.

"Oh, I suppose so," admitted the lady vaguely. The room, in fact, looked over the leafy garden and the road beyond. It had a French window opening on to a small balcony, and to this, under the strange influence that always attracted him to light, Carrados walked.

"I expect that there is a certain amount of repair needed?" he said, after standing there a moment.

"I am afraid there would be," she confessed.

"I ask because there is a sheet of metal on the floor here," he continued. "Now that, in an old house, spells dry rot to the wary observer."

"My husband said that the rain, which comes in a little under the window, was rotting the boards there," she replied. "He put that down recently. I had not noticed anything myself."

It was the first time she had mentioned her husband; Mr. Carlyle pricked up his ears.

"Ah, that is a less serious matter," said Carrados. "May I step out on to the balcony?"

"Oh yes, if you like to." Then, as he appeared to be fumbling at the catch, "Let me open it for you."

But the window was already open, and Carrados, facing the various points of the compass, took in the bearings.

"A sunny, sheltered corner," he remarked. "An ideal spot for a deck-chair and a book."

She shrugged her shoulders half contemptuously.

"I dare say," she replied, "but I never use it."

"Sometimes, surely," he persisted mildly. "It would be my favourite retreat. But then——"

"I was going to say that I had never even been out on it, but that would not be quite true. It has two uses for me, both equally romantic; I occasionally shake a duster from it, and when my husband returns late without his latchkey he wakes me up and I come out here and drop him mine."

Further revelation of Mr. Creake's nocturnal habits was cut off, greatly to Mr. Carlyle's annoyance by a cough of unmistakable significance from the foot of the stairs. They had heard a trade cart drive up to the gate, a knock at the door, and the heavy-footed woman tramp along the hall.

"Excuse me a minute, please," said Mrs. Creake.

"Louis," said Carrados, in a sharp whisper, the moment they were alone, "stand against the door."

With extreme plausibility Mr. Carlyle began to admire a picture so situated that while he was there it was impossible to open the door more than a few inches. From that position he observed his confederate go through the curious procedure of kneeling down on the bedroom floor and for a full minute pressing his ear to the sheet of metal that had already engaged his attention. Then he rose to his feet, nodded, dusted his trousers, and Mr. Carlyle moved to a less equivocal position.

"What a beautiful rose-tree grows up your balcony," remarked Carrados, stepping into the room as Mrs. Creake returned. "I suppose you are very fond of gardening?"

"I detest it," she replied.

"But this *Gloire*, so carefully trained ——?"

"Is it?" she replied. "I think my husband was nailing it up recently." By some strange fatality Carrados's most aimless remarks seemed to involve the absent Mr. Creake. "Do you care to see the garden?"

The garden proved to be extensive and neglected. Behind the house was chiefly orchard. In front, some semblance of order had been kept up; here it was lawn and shrubbery, and the drive they had walked along. Two things interested Carrados: the soil at the foot of the balcony, which he declared on examination to be particularly suitable for roses, and the fine chestnut-tree in the corner by the road.

As they walked back to the car Mr. Carlyle lamented that they had learned so little of Creake's movements.

"Perhaps the telegram will tell us something," suggested Carrados. "Read it, Louis."

Mr. Carlyle cut open the envelope, glanced at the enclosure, and in spite of his disappointment could not restrain a chuckle.

"My poor Max," he explained, "you have put yourself to an amount of ingenious trouble for nothing. Creake is evidently taking a few days' holiday and prudently availed himself of the Meteorological Office forecast before going. Listen: '*Immediate prospect for London warm and settled. Further outlook cooler but fine.*' Well, well; I did

get a pound of tomatoes for *my* fourpence."

"You certainly scored there, Louis," admitted Carrados, with humorous appreciation. "I wonder," he added speculatively, "whether it is Creake's peculiar taste usually to spend his week-end holiday in London."

"Eh?" exclaimed Mr. Carlyle, looking at the words again, "by gad, that's rum, Max. They go to Weston-super-Mare. Why on earth should he want to know about London?"

"I can make a guess, but before we are satisfied I must come here again. Take another look at that kite, Louis. Are there a few yards of string hanging loose from it?"

"Yes, there are."

"Rather thick string—unusually thick for the purpose?"

"Yes; but how do you know?"

As they drove home again Carrados explained, and Mr. Carlyle sat aghast, saying incredulously: "Good God, Max, is it possible?"

An hour later he was satisfied that it was possible. In reply to his inquiry someone in his office telephoned him the information that "they" had left Paddington by the four-thirty for Weston.

¶

IT was more than a week after his introduction to Carrados that Lieutenant Hollyer had a summons to present himself at The Turrets again. He found Mr. Carlyle already there and the two friends awaiting his arrival.

"I stayed in all day after hearing from you this morning, Mr. Carrados," he said, shaking hands. "When I got your second message I was all ready to walk straight out of the house. That's how I did it in the time. I hope everything is all right?"

"Excellent," replied Carrados. "You'd better have something before we start. We probably have a long and perhaps an exciting night before us."

"And certainly a wet one," assented the lieutenant. "It was thundering over Mulling way as I came along."

"That is why you are here," said his host. "We are waiting for a certain message before we start, and in the meantime you may as well understand what we expect to happen. As you saw, there is a thunderstorm coming on. The Meteorological Office morning forecast predicted it for the whole of London if the conditions remained. That was why I kept you in readiness. Within an hour it is now inevitable that we shall experience a deluge. Here and there damage will be done to trees and buildings; here and there a person will probably be struck and killed."

"Yes."

"It is Mr. Creake's intention that his wife should be among the victims."

"I don't exactly follow," said Hollyer, looking from one man to the other. "I quite admit that Creake would be immensely relieved if such a thing did happen, but the chance is surely an absurdly remote one."

"Yet unless we intervene it is precisely what a coroner's jury will decide has happened. Do you know whether your brother-in-law has any practical knowledge of electricity, Mr. Hollyer?"

"I cannot say. He was so reserved, and we really knew so little of him——"

"Yet in 1896 an Austin Creake contributed an article on 'Alternating Currents' to the American *Scientific World*. That would argue a fairly intimate acquaintanceship."

"But do you mean that he is going to direct a flash of lightning?"

"Only into the minds of the doctor who conducts the post-mortem, and the coroner. This storm, the opportunity for which he has been waiting for weeks, is merely the cloak to his act. The weapon which he has planned to use—scarcely less powerful than lightning but much more tractable—is the high voltage current of electricity that flows along the tram wire at his gate."

"Oh!" exclaimed Lieutenant Hollyer, as the sudden revelation struck him.

"Some time between eleven o'clock to-night—about the hour when your sister goes to bed—and one-thirty in the morning—the time up to which he can rely on the current—Creake will throw a stone up at the balcony window. Most of his preparation has long been made; it only remains for him to connect up a short length to the window handle and a longer one at the other end to tap the live wire. That done, he will wake his wife in the way I have said. The moment she moves the catch of the window—and he has carefully filed its parts to ensure perfect contact—she will be electrocuted as effectually as if she sat in the executioner's chair in Sing Sing prison."

"But what are we doing here!" exclaimed Hollyer, starting to his feet, pale

and horrified. "It is past ten now and anything may happen."

"Quite natural, Mr. Hollyer," said Carrados, reassuringly, "but you need have no anxiety. Creake is being watched, the house is being watched, and your sister is as safe as if she slept to-night in Windsor Castle. Be assured that whatever happens he will not be allowed to complete his scheme; but it is desirable to let him implicate himself to the fullest limit. Your brother-in-law, Mr. Hollyer, is a man with a peculiar capacity for taking pains."

"He is a damned cold-blooded scoundrel!" exclaimed the young officer fiercely. "When I think of Millicent five years ago——"

"Well, for that matter, an enlightened nation has decided that electrocution is the most humane way of removing its superfluous citizens," suggested Carrados, mildly. "He is certainly an ingenious-minded gentleman. It is his misfortune that in Mr. Carlyle he was fated to be opposed by an even subtler brain——"

"No, no! Really, Max!" protested the embarrassed gentleman.

"Mr. Hollyer will be able to judge for himself when I tell him that it was Mr. Carlyle who first drew attention to the significance of the abandoned kite," insisted Carrados, firmly. "Then, of course, its object became plain to me—as indeed to any one. For ten minutes, perhaps, a wire must be carried from the overhead line to the chestnut-tree. Creake has everything in his favour, but it is just within possibility that the driver of an inopportune tram might notice the appendage. What of that? Why, for more than a week he has seen a derelict kite with its yards of trailing string hanging in the tree. A very calculating mind, Mr. Hollyer. It would be interesting to know what line of action Mr. Creake has mapped out for himself afterwards. I expect he has half a dozen artistic little touches up his sleeve. Possibly he would merely singe his wife's hair, burn her feet with a red-hot poker, shiver the glass of the French window, and be content with that to let well alone. You see, lightning is so varied in its effects that whatever he did or did not do would be right. He is in the impregnable position of the body showing all the symptoms of death by lightning shock and nothing else but lightning to account for it—a dilated eye, heart contracted in systole, bloodless lungs shrunk to a third the normal weight, and all the rest of it. When he has removed a few outward traces of his work Creake might quite safely 'discover' his dead wife and rush off for the nearest doctor. Or he may have decided to arrange a convincing alibi, and creep away, leaving the discovery to another. We shall never know; he will make no confession."

"I wish it was well over," admitted Hollyer. "I'm not particularly jumpy, but this gives me a touch of the creeps."

"Three more hours at the worst, Lieutenant," said Carrados, cheerfully. "Ah-ha, something is coming through now."

He went to the telephone and received a message from one quarter; then made another connection and talked for a few minutes with someone else.

"Everything working smoothly," he remarked between times over his shoulder. "Your sister has gone to bed, Mr. Hollyer."

Then he turned to the house telephone and distributed his orders.

"So we," he concluded, "must get up."

By the time they were ready a large closed motor car was waiting. The lieutenant thought he recognised Parkinson in the well-swathed form beside the driver, but there was no temptation to linger for a second on the steps. Already the stinging rain had lashed the drive into the semblance of a frothy estuary; all round the lightning jagged its course through the incessant tremulous glow of more distant lightning, while the thunder only ceased its muttering to turn at close quarters and crackle viciously.

"One of the few things I regret missing," remarked Carrados, tranquilly; "but I hear a good deal of colour in it."

The car slushed its way down to the gate, lurched a little heavily across the dip into the road and, steadying as it came upon the straight, began to hum contentedly along the deserted highway.

"We are not going direct?" suddenly inquired Hollyer, after they had travelled perhaps half a dozen miles. The night was bewildering enough but he had the sailor's gift for location.

"No; through Hunscott Green and then by a fieldpath to the orchard at the back," replied Carrados. "Keep a sharp look-out for the man with the lantern about here, Harris," he called through the tube.

"Something flashing just ahead, sir," came the reply, and the car slowed down and stopped.

Carrados dropped the near window as a man in glistening waterproof stepped from the shelter of a lich-gate and approached.

"Inspector Beedel, sir," said the stranger, looking into the car.

"Quite right, Inspector," said Carrados. "Get in."

"I have a man with me, sir."

"We can find room for him as well."

"We are very wet."

"So shall we all be soon."

The lieutenant changed his seat and the two burly forms took places side by side. In less than five minutes the car stopped again, this time in a grassy country lane.

"Now we have to face it," announced Carrados. "The inspector will show us the way."

The car slid round and disappeared into the night, while Beedel led the party to a stile in the hedge. A couple of fields brought them to the Brookbend boundary. There a figure stood out of the black foliage, exchanged a few words with their guide and piloted them along the shadows of the orchard to the back door of the house.

"You will find a broken pane near the catch of the scullery window," said the blind man.

"Right, sir," replied the inspector. "I have it. Now who goes through?"

"Mr. Hollyer will open the door for us. I'm afraid you must take off your boots and all wet things, Lieutenant. We cannot risk a single spot inside."

They waited until the back door opened, then each one divested himself in a similar manner and passed into the kitchen, where the remains of a fire still burned. The man from the orchard gathered together the discarded garments and disappeared again.

Carrados turned to the lieutenant.

"A rather delicate job for you now, Mr. Hollyer. I want you to go up to your sister, wake her, and get her into another room with as little fuss as possible. Tell her as much as you think fit and let her understand that her very life depends on absolute stillness when she is alone. Don't be unduly hurried, but not a glimmer of a light, please.

Ten minutes passed by the measure of the battered old alarum on the dresser shelf before the young man returned.

"I've had rather a time of it," he reported, with a nervous laugh, "but I think it will be all right now. She is in the spare room."

"Then we will take our places. You and Parkinson come with me to the bedroom. Inspector, you have your own arrangements. Mr. Carlyle will be with you."

They dispersed silently about the house. Hollyer glanced apprehensively at the door of the spare room as they passed it, but within was as quiet as the grave. Their room lay at the other end of the passage.

"You may as well take your place in the bed now, Hollyer," directed Carrados when they were inside and the door closed. "Keep well down among the clothes. Creake has to get up on the balcony, you know, and he will probably peep through the window, but he dare come no farther. Then when he begins to throw up stones slip on this dressing-gown of your sister's. I'll tell you what to do after."

The next sixty minutes drew out into the longest hour that the lieutenant had ever known. Occasionally he heard a whisper pass between the two men who stood behind the window curtains, but he could see nothing. Then Carrados threw a guarded remark in his direction.

"He is in the garden now."

Something scraped slightly against the outer wall. But the night was full of wilder sounds, and in the house the furniture and the boards creaked and sprung between the yawling of the wind among the chimneys, the rattle of the thunder and the pelting of the rain. It was a time to quicken the steadiest pulse, and when the crucial moment came, when a pebble suddenly rang against the pane with a sound that the tense waiting magnified into a shivering crash, Hollyer leapt from the bed on the instant.

"Easy, easy," warned Carrados, feelingly. "We will wait for another knock." He passed something across. "Here is a rubber glove. I have cut the wire but you had better put it on. Stand just for a moment at the window, move the catch so that it can blow open a little, and drop immediately. Now."

Another stone had rattled against the glass. For Hollyer to go through his part was the work merely of seconds, and with a few touches Carrados spread the dressing-gown to more effective disguise about the extended form. But an unforeseen and in the circumstances rather horrible interval followed, for Creake, in accordance with some detail of his never-revealed plan, continued to shower missile after missile against the panes until even the unimpressionable Parkinson shivered.

The Tragedy at Brookbend Cottage

"The last act," whispered Carrados, a moment after the throwing had ceased. "He has gone round to the back. Keep as you are. We take cover now." He pressed behind the arras of an extemporised wardrobe, and the spirit of emptiness and desolation seemed once more to reign over the lonely house.

From half a dozen places of concealment ears were straining to catch the first guiding sound. He moved very stealthily, burdened, perhaps, by some strange scruple in the presence of the tragedy that he had not feared to contrive, paused for a moment at the bedroom door, then opened it very quietly, and in the fickle light read the consummation of his hopes.

"At last!" they heard the sharp whisper drawn from his relief. "At last!"

He took another step and two shadows seemed to fall upon him from behind, one on either side. With primitive instinct a cry of terror and surprise escaped him as he made a desperate movement to wrench himself free, and for a short second he almost succeeded in dragging one hand into a pocket. Then his wrists slowly came together and the handcuffs closed.

"I am Inspector Beedel," said the man on his right side. "You are charged with the attempted murder of your wife, Millicent Creake."

"You are mad," retorted the miserable creature, falling into a desperate calmness. "She has been struck by lightning."

"No, you blackguard, she hasn't," wrathfully exclaimed his brother-in-law, jumping up. "Would you like to see her?"

"I also have to warn you," continued the inspector impassively, "that anything you say may be used as evidence against you."

A startled cry from the farther end of the passage arrested their attention.

"Mr. Carrados," called Hollyer, "oh, come at once."

At the open door of the other bedroom stood the lieutenant, his eyes still turned towards something in the room beyond, a little empty bottle in his hand.

"Dead!" he exclaimed tragically, with a sob, "with this beside her. Dead just when she would have been free of the brute."

The blind man passed into the room, sniffed the air, and laid a gentle hand on the pulseless heart.

"Yes," he replied. "That, Hollyer, does not always appeal to the woman, strange to say."

Beatrix Esmond Welcomes Her Cousin

SO she came holding her dress with one fair rounded arm, and her taper before her, tripping down the stair to greet Esmond.

"She hath put on her scarlet stockings and white shoes," said my Lord, still laughing. "Oh, my fine mistress! is this the way you set your cap at the Captain?" She approached, shining smiles upon Esmond, who could look at nothing but her eyes. She advanced holding her head, as if she would have him kiss her as he used to do when she was a child.

"Stop," she said, "I am grown too big! Welcome, cousin Harry," and she made him an arch curtsey, sweeping down to the ground almost, with the most gracious bend, looking up the while with the brightest eyes and sweetest smile. Love seemed to radiate from her. Harry eyed her with such a rapture as the first lover is described as having by Milton.

"*N'est-ce pas?*" says my lady, in a low, sweet voice, still hanging on his arm.

Esmond turned round with a start and a blush, as he met his dear mistress's clear eyes. He had forgotten her, rapt in admiration of the *filia pulcrior*.

"Right foot forward, toe turned out, so: now drop the curtsey and show the red stockings, Trix. They've silver clocks, Harry. The Dowager sent 'em. She went to put 'em on," cries my lord.

"Hush, you stupid child," says Miss, smothering her brother with kisses; and then she must come and kiss her mamma, looking all the while at Harry over his mistress's shoulder. And if she did not kiss him, she gave him both her hands, and then took one of his in both hands, and said, "Oh, Harry, we're so, *so* glad you've come!"

WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY.

The Commutation Chophouse

Of an amazing "one day only" offer

By CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

IT was two days before Christmas, and Dove Dulcet had come down town to have lunch with me. As he arrived rather early, we were taking a little stroll round the bright, windy streets before our meal, enjoying the colour and movement of the scene. We stopped by St. Paul's churchyard to note the curious contrast of the old chocolate spire relieved against the huge glittering shaft of the Woolworth Building. At the noon hour St. Paul's stands in the dark shadow of the great cliffs to the south, while the Woolworth pinnacle leaps up like a spearhead into the golden vacancy of day-long sunshine.

"Saint Paul in the shadow, Saint Frank in the sun," said Dove with gentle irony. "It seems to prove that ten cents put in the cash register gets nearer Heaven than ten cents dropped in the collection plate."

When Dove is philosophical, he is always full of quaint matter, but I was hardly heeding what he said. My eye had been caught by a crowd gathered at the corner of Church Street. Over the heads of the throng was a winking spark of light that flashed this way and that as though spun from a turning mirror.

"Let's go and see what's doing," I said. My poet friend is always docile, and he followed me down Fulton Street.

"It looks to me like a silk hat," he said.

And so it was. On the corner of the pavement stood a tall, stout, and very well-nourished man with a ruddy face, wearing shabby but still presentable cutaway coat and grey trousers, and crowned by a steep and glittering stovepipe hat which twinkled like a heliograph in the dazzling winter glare. But, the most amazing, when we elbowed a passage through the jocular crowd, we saw that this personable individual was wearing, instead of an overcoat, two large sandwich boards vigorously lettered as follows:

THE COMMUTATION CHOPHOUSE
OPENS TO-DAY
59 Ann Street
Celebrate the Merry Yuletide!
One Prodigious Meal, $1
BUY A STRIP TICKET
AND SAVE MONEY
TO-DAY ONLY
100 meals for $10

This corpulent sandwich man was blithely answering the banter of those who were not awed by the radiance of his headgear and the dignity of his mien, and passing out printed cards to those nearest him.

"Do all the hundred meals have to be eaten to-day?" asked Dulcet. "If so, the task is beyond my powers."

"Like the man in the Bible," I said, "he probably rented his garments. But he couldn't rent that admirable abdomen that proclaims him a well-fed man. It seems to me a very sound ad. for the chophouse."

"Unquestionably," said my friend, gravely, "he is the man who put the ad in adipose."

The sandwich man, unabashed by these remarks, handed me one of his cards, which Dulcet and I read together:

> K. Jefferson Gastric, the best-fed man south of 42nd Street, takes this importunity of urging you to become a steakholder in the Commutation Chophouse. Why pay for overhead expense? In the Commutation Chophouse all unnecessaries are discarded and you pay only for food, not for finger-bowls and a lovely female cashier. No tips. To-day Only, the Opening Day, to celebrate the jovial Yule, the management will sell Strip Tickets entitling you to 100 Glorious Meals, for $10.

At this point a policeman politely urged Mr. Gastric to move on, and he passed genially down Church Street, his resplendent hat glowing above a trail of followers.

"Come on," I said; "it's time to eat, anyway. Let's go over to Ann Street

and have a look at this philanthropic venture."

"Well," said Dulcet, "since it's your turn to buy, far be it from me to protest."

The narrow channel of Ann Street is always crowded at the lunch hour, but on that occasion it was doubly congested with patrons of the amusing toyshops. We pushed patiently along, and passing Nassau Street moved into a darker and shabbier region. A sound of music rose upon the air. To our surprise, at the entrance to an unsuspected alley stood a fiddler playing a merry jig. Beside him was another sandwich man, also stout and well-favoured and in Fifth Avenue attire, carrying boards which read:

ENTRANCE TO THE
COMMUTATION CHOPHOUSE
Eat Drink and Be Merry
For To-morrow We Die
To-day Only, for the Jocund Yule,
Strip Tickets for
100 Square Meals, $10

"This is highly diverting," I said. "Apparently we go down this passage. Come on, everyone seems bound the same way. We won't get a seat unless we make haste."

Dulcet was gazing reflectively at the sandwich boards. His blue eyes had a quizzical twinkle.

"For God, for country, and for Yule," he said. "Queer that this should happen on Ann Street. I seem to remember——"

"Queer that it should happen anywhere," I interrupted him. "It's a clever advertising stunt, anyway—100 meals for $10. It seems too good to be true."

"The only thing I'm afraid of," he said, "is that it is literally true."

"Walk in, gents, give us a try," cried the sandwich man. "Try anything once, gents."

"Come on, Dove," I said, seeing that others were crowding ahead of us down the alley. "None of your paradoxes!"

The narrow passage turned into a courtyard overlooked by old grimy warehouses with iron-shuttered windows. In one corner was a fine substantial brick building with a rounded front, and a long flight of wooden stairs that seemed to lead up to a marine junk shop, for old sea-boots and ships' lanterns and fenders hung along the wall. In a basement was an iron foundry where we could see the bright glow of a forge. Halfway down the little area was a low door with a huge stone lintel-piece over which was a large canvas sign: THE COMMUTATION CHOPHOUSE.

I must confess to an irrational affection for quaint eating places, and having explored down-town New York's crowded cafes and lunchrooms rather carefully in quest of a congenial tavern, the Commutation Chophouse struck me as highly original and pleasing. We stepped down into a very large and rather dark cellar that apparently had previously been used as a carpenter's shop, for a good many traces of the earlier tenancy were still visible. The furnishings were of the plainest, consisting simply of heavy wooden tables and benches. There was no linen on the tables, but the wood had been scrubbed scrupulously clean and there were piles of tissue napkins. From a door at the back waiters came rushing with trays of food. A glorious clatter of knives and forks filled the air, and it looked at first as though we would find no place to sit. As Dove expressed it, the room was loaded to the muzzle; and a continuous stream of patrons was coming down the alley, allured by the sandwich man and the absurd thin gaiety of the fiddle. By the front door stood a dark young man, behind a small counter, selling tickets.

"One meal for a dollar," he cried, repeatedly, as he took in money. "One hundred meals for ten dollars. Get your commutation tickets here."

"We'll try two single meals to begin with," I said, and put down a ten-dollar bill.

The young man rummaged in a drawer full of greasy notes to get the change. "Better get a commutation," he said. "Tremendous saving."

"I should think you'd need a cash register," said Dulcet. "Handling all that kale, it would be useful in keeping the accounts straight."

The young man looked up sharply.

"Say," he retorted, "what are you, mister? Cash-register salesman? Step along please, don't block the gangway. Next! Seats in the rear! No, commutation tickets not transferable. Good only to the purchaser. Ten dollars, please. Next!"

"They seem to be coining money," said Dove, as we found places at last in a rear corner.

"Well," I said, "this is just the kind of

place I like. By jove, this building must be well over a hundred years old. Look at those beams in the ceiling. All they need is a few sporting prints and an open fireplace. Lit by candles, too, you see. Well, well, this is the real alehouse atmosphere. Why, it's as good as the Cheshire Cheese. This is the kind of place where I can imagine Doctor Johnson and Charles Lamb sitting in a corner."

"You are an incurable sentimentalist," he said. "Besides, Lamb would have had to sit on Johnson's knee, I expect. If I remember rightly, Lamb was a very small urchin when Doctor Johnson died."

"Why be so literal?" I protested. "Haven't you any sentiment for fine antique flavour, and all that sort of thing?"

"If there is one thing where sentiment plays no part with me," he said, "it is food. At meal times I am distinctly a realist. Fine antique flavour is rather upsetting when you find it your meat. But still," he continued, "I must admit this looks good." He beamed approvingly at the thick chop and baked potatoes and beans and coffee the waiter had put down in front of us.

"Evidently you don't order your food," I said. "They give you the standardized meal of the day. Fall to! These beans baked in cheese strike me as excellent."

I have never seen waiters rush around with such speed as they did in that crowded cellar, where flickering candle-gleams cast a tawny light over the crowded tables of men packed shoulder to shoulder. They flashed in and out through the rear door like men possessed. They careered in with trays of steaming viands, crashed them down on the bare tables, and fled out again, napkins streaming behind them like pennants. Once they had delivered your food it seemed impossible to catch their gaze, for we tried to hail one to ask for ketchup. It was no use. He flew hither and yon with frantic and single-minded energy.

"These waiters speed like dervishes," I said. "Evidently the no-tip rule does not lessen their zeal."

"Perhaps they get a share in the profits of the enterprise," said Dulcet, placidly.

Just behind us was a small barred window looking out on a street. It was at the ground level, and looking through the dusty pane I could see horses' hoofs going by, and the feet of pedestrians. Suddenly there was a great clang and crash outside, and I turned to look.

"What's up?" said Dulcet, who was cheerfully disposing of his chop as well as his neighbour's elbow would permit him.

"They seem to have spilled some beans," I said, peering through the dusky aperture. "There's a truck delivering food or something at the back door. They've tipped over a can, I think."

"Spilled some beans? he said, with his first sign of real interest. "That sounds symbolic. Let me have a look."

He stood up on the bench and gazed outward. Presently he sat down again and went on calmly with his meal. Some excellent cheese cake was brought us as dessert.

"That alley behind us," he said. "I suppose it communicates with Beekman Street, doesn't it?"

"I guess so. Why?"

"Just wondering. Ben, I apologize for my scepticism. The food here is jolly good. In fact, it's so good that I think I've tasted it before. I am your debtor for a very enlarging experience. And now, as the crowd is becoming almost oppressive, and I can see that there are others eager to commute, suppose we smoke our cigars outdoors."

"Right you are," I said. "And since the food is eatable, and I happen to have the money with me, I think I'll invest in one of those strip tickets. Everyone else seems to be doing it, and it looks to me a good way to save money. A hundred lunches—why, that will see me through till spring. I don't think I'll get tired of eating here, it's so amusing."

"No," said Dove, as he picked up his hat, "I don't think you'll get tired of eating here. Perhaps the money will be well spent."

I bought my commutation, and we stood in the shabby old courtyard for a few minutes watching the crowd stream in. A good many, I noticed, though unable to find seats, still took advantage of the opening-day offer and bought the hundred meal tickets for future consumption.

"The only drawback about this place is the crowd," I said. "If this keeps up, half of down-town New York will be eating here."

"Look here," said Dove, "I think I shall be down this way again to-morrow. It's my turn to buy. Will you lunch with me

then? We'll celebrate the jovial Yule together."

"Fine," I said. "Meet you at the old red newspaper-box at the corner of Broadway and Vesey to-morrow at 12 o'clock."

¶

WE were both there punctually.

"Have you got your appetite with you?" asked Dove. "It's a bit early for feasting, but it'll give us time for a stroll after lunch."

"Where do we eat?" I said. "Commutation again? It's all velvet to me, anyway, all my lunches are paid for for the next three months."

"There's a little place on Beekman Street I used to know," he said. "Let's try that."

We found a corner table in an odd old eating house at the corner of Beekman and Gold streets, which I had never seen before.

"I'm a great believer in tit for tat, fair play, and all that sort of thing," said Dulcet when the waiter approached. "You gave me an excellent lunch yesterday. I intend to give you the same lunch to-day, if you can stand eating it again. Waiter! Mutton chop, baked potato, baked beans, coffee, and cheese cake. For two."

When the beans came, baked with cheese in a little brown dish, just as they were served the day before, I must confess that I was startled.

"Why, these beans are done exactly like those we had at the Commutation," I said. "Are these people doing the cooking for the chophouse?"

"Perhaps you'll have to eat chop and beans for a hundred lunches," Dulcet said. "Well, it's a hearty diet. After all, the sandwich boards simply said a hundred meals. They didn't guarantee that they would be different."

I insisted that on our way back toward the office we should stop at the Commutation Chophouse and find out from a customer what the bill of fare had been on the second day. The vision of a hundred repetitions of any meal, however good, is rather ghastly.

"I don't hear the minstrel to-day," Dove observed as we drew near the alley.

"Oh, well," I said, "that was just to draw business for the opening."

We turned down the passage at No. 59. Quite a crowd of patrons were waiting their turn, I saw. They were standing in the courtyard by the chophouse door, talking busily.

"You see," I said, "it's still crowded."

We reached the entrance. The door was closed. The sign over the doorway now had additional lettering painted on it, and read:

THE COMMUTATION CHOPHOUSE
The Other 99 Meals Will Be Served
In Augusta, Maine.

"Come on, Ben," said Dulcet. "No use trying to break through a window. There's no one there. I wonder what the fare is to Augusta?"

"You rascal!" I cried. "If you suspected this, why the devil did you encourage me to squander my $10?"

"I simply said it would probably be well spent," he said, with a clear blue humourous gaze. "If it helps to cauterize your magnificent credulity, it will be."

We sat down on a bench in St. Paul's churchyard to smoke a pipe together while I performed some mental obsequies over my vanished Federal Reserve certificate. Dove looked up at the sparkling gilded turret of the Woolworth.

"I daresay Frank Woolworth would have fallen for it, too," Dove said. "The idea of a hundred meals for ten cents each would have appealed to him. But you know, old man, there are certain fixed and immutable laws that the observant city dweller is accustomed to. My motto is, whenever you find an apparent exception to those laws, look for an enigma in the woodpile. I suspected something wrong when I saw that sandwich man on Church Street. A man as fat as that doesn't generally take a job sandwiching. Also I have doubts about people who insist on calling Christmas 'Yule.' Moreover, a man doesn't generally take a job sandwiching until his shirt is so ragged that he is ashamed to exhibit it in public, when he is glad to cover it up with the boards. Those two fat sandwicheers were members of the firm, I fear, for their linen was O. K. And, secondly, what are the first things a man gets if he really intends to start a restaurant? A cash register and a bunch of ketchup bottles. There wasn't a cash register nor a ketchup bottle in sight in the Commutation Chophouse. No, my dear; what you admired as carefully arranged atmosphere of antiquity, the plain board tables and candles and so on, was really stark cheapness. They weren't

spending any money on overhead; they said so themselves.

"When you called my attention to the spilled beans, I was sure. For they were not merely beans: they were baked beans; a far more significant matter. When I looked out of the window I could see at once that there was no kitchen attached to the Commutation Chophouse. The food was all being delivered from that place on Beekman Street, whose name was on the truck. A few ingenious rogues simply rented that old cellar, cheaply enough I guess, put in a few tables, arranged to have grub shipped in from near by, printed their commutation tickets, and sat down to collect as many dollars as they could."

"Well, of all infernal liars," I cried, "they certainly take the prize."

"Not so," said Dulcet as we got up to go. "You should have read the sandwich boards a little more carefully. Their ingenious author, whom you chide as the Ann Street Ananias, really told the exact and circumstantial truth."

We stood at the gateway of the graveyard, and gazed across the roaring traffic of Broadway. Dove smiled and said he must be starting on his Christmas shopping.

"I tried to warn you," he said, "but you wouldn't listen. As I was about to say just before we visited the place, it was queer that it should happen on Ann Street. Don't you remember that a certain famous gentleman had his museum at the corner of Broadway and Ann? And it was he, I think, who remarked that there's one born every minute. Well, Merry Christmas!"

Words and Wisdom

THOSE who talk much never say anything. BOILEAU.

MAN says what he knows; woman says what will please. ROSSEAU.

WE live and learn but not the wiser grow. POMFRET.

THOUGH the origin of most of our words is forgotten, each word was at first a stroke of genius. EMERSON.

HE is very wise who is not foolish for long. PROVERB.

WE talk little when vanity does not make us talk. LA ROCHEFOUCAULD.

WORDS are wise men's counters; they do but reckon by them: but they are the money of fools. HOBBES.

TWO great talkers will not travel far together. BORROW.

IT is always the best policy to speak the truth, unless of course you are an exceptionally good liar. J. K. JEROME.

WORDS are the only things that last for ever. HAZLITT.

THEY who travel in pursuit of wisdom walk only in a circle, and, after all their labour, at last return to their pristine ignorance. GOLDSMITH.

WORDS that may become alive and walk up and down in the hearts of the hearers. KIPLING.

Mary of Memories

"Love lends life a little grace"

By TOM GALLON

SHE was dead. In those three words lay the world of might-have-been; under those three words, as under a headstone, lay memory and hope and love, and every fair thing the man had ever known.

Rousing from sleep in the morning, those words stared at him, and made the day desolate even at the beginning; in the darkness, when he crept to his bed again, they throbbed in his brain as something never to be forgotten—something never to be effaced. Through all the years, while he went on in the mere sordid matter of living and eating and sleeping, it must always be like that. She was dead.

In the life the man had hammered out and moulded and shaped for himself, she was to live a long, long time. There had never been any thought in his mind of death, as touching her; the thing was impossible. He had not even any vague idea that she could ever grow old, or that the bright hair in which the sunlight loved to linger could grow grey or white, or the rounded face get lines and wrinkles in it. In the impossible dreams of happiness she had always been young, and always very fair.

After all, it was quite an ordinary story. John Wakefield was a man who had cherished certain ideals, and yet had never had them fulfilled until he met this particular woman. He had gone abroad as a young man, and had lived a life of adventure; had, by a lucky stroke of fortune, found himself suddenly rich at a time when most men are beginning to think about riches; and so had returned to England. Then, suddenly and blindingly, on the quiet, peaceful lawn of an English house, love had come to him for the first time; and the man had understood that before this he had not known what life meant.

Mary! Mary of the blue eyes! She had died in the summer—the summer that she loved. It had been a tragedy too deep for tears—a sorrow that no words could compass. A sudden illness, striking her down within a few hours. John Wakefield had sat beside her bed, holding her hand; he had listened to words she spoke, as in a dream. Outside the birds were singing; everything was full of life. Inside she lay dying.

"You will not ever marry," she whispered. "I know you too well. Be good to all women—because one of them loved you."

He sat now, with his head in his hands, in the loneliness of his room, thinking about it all. He had gone away and hidden himself on that day when they buried her; he could not bear to think of that. If he must think of her at all as the bride of Death, he liked to think of her lying quiet, with a smile upon her lips, and with the flowers they had put about her; no more than that.

He must be good to all women. What had she meant by that? Of course he would never marry; the thing was out of the question. He wondered what she had meant by that other phrase; he wondered what had been in her mind, when her eyes were closing for the last time, and she was going out into the great darkness. He wished now that he had asked her that; he wondered if he would ever understand.

She was in the room with him now, just as she had often been in the days that were gone. Not an actual presence—but the mere dear suggestion of her, as he had seen her more than once, moving about the room. He must get away from that; the thought was disturbing—something that was breaking down his manhood. She would not have wished that he should dwell on his sorrow like this; and, after all, death for her had meant no more than a falling asleep before the evening of life had come on. He must remember that; he must pull himself together, if only in justice to her memory.

He went out into the streets, and rubbed shoulders with his fellow-men, and was the better for the contact. The gentle spirit of the dead girl was with him yet, softening

him, and yet brushing away from him the sadness that had been his since death; he began almost to feel that, apart from love, there was something left for him in life. Mary of the blue eyes would not have wished that he should sit down, and let life go past; she had loved him for what he had done, and for what he was yet to do.

It was late when John Wakefield, with the natural hunger of a normal man, began to think that it might be possible for him to eat something. The thought was not repugnant, because now the man set about these ordinary things in a mechanical way, for the mere sustaining of life, and not with any real enjoyment. After all, he might as well get a comfortable meal; he had walked the streets for a long time, and was tired. The prospect of some place in which he could sit down in peace allured him strongly.

He came to a quiet restaurant—a place in which he had never been before; he pushed open the doors, and entered. His quick glance round told him that the place was almost deserted; he seated himself at a table, and, after casually scanning the menu, gave an order in a low voice to the obsequious waiter beside him. The man hurried noiselessly away, and John Wakefield leaned back in his chair, and took a more observant glance round the place.

It was later than the usual hour for dining, and too early for people bent on supping. A couple of foreigners, with their elbows planted firmly on either side of a narrow table, were gesticulating, with their hands spread fanwise in the air, and their fingers moving. A stout man with a napkin tucked under his chin was feeding with the heavy stolidity of a man to whom a meal is the most serious business of life. And at another table sat a woman.

John Wakefield's eyes came to the woman last, and rested there. His thoughts had been with Mary of the blue eyes—Mary, pure and spotless as the lilies that had lain on her dead breast; he shuddered involuntarily as he looked at this woman, and frowned and looked away. What she was was stamped all over her; in the mask of colour on her cheeks, hiding the woman beneath; in the style of her dress; in everything about her. He wondered, a little impatiently, why these women were allowed in such places at all.

She was seated directly opposite Wakefield's table, and the restaurant was a narrow one. The waiter bustled about between the tables, setting straight knives and forks that were already laid to perfection, and flicking imaginary crumbs away from time to time. John Wakefield, taking his soup, found himself raising his eyes and looking across at the woman.

"Be good to all women—because one loved you!"

Mary of the blue eyes had said that; Mary, who would scarcely have known what this creature's life meant, in the strange complexity of the world. John Wakefield found himself looking at the woman with a new understanding—almost a new pity. For the face, as he saw it now in the light of what Mary of the blue eyes had said, had once been beautiful; and even now the mouth had a tender curve to it that not all the horror of her life had been able to stamp out of it.

She did not seem to be eating anything; from time to time she sipped a little cheap wine. It was obvious that she had come in there for shelter, or she might be waiting for someone.

When he raised his eyes again he saw that she had something spread out under her hand—something which she was reading. He could not at first make out what it was; but he noticed that her face had broken up into smiles, and had strange little lights and dimples in it that had not been there before. In a vague, half-indifferent way he began to wonder what it could be that had worked that miracle in her.

She had taken her hands away from the paper for a moment; he saw that it was a letter. The waiter, hurrying along between the tables to attend the summons of an excited forefinger raised by one of the foreigners, whisked past that particular table, and whisked off the letter. It turned a little quick somersault in the air, and fluttered across the room and fell beside where John Wakefield sat.

She had risen quickly to recover it, and John Wakefield had stooped at the same moment, on a mere impulse to pick it up. He was holding it out to her, half risen from his seat, when he noticed two things that brought him up, with a shock, hard against something new and startling.

The eyes that looked into his, with a half-dawning smile of thanks, were full of tears—hanging unshed. And the letter, at which he had glanced for a moment as he picked it up, was in a large, scrawled handwriting on carefully ruled lines.

She sat down again, crumpling up the letter as she did so, and thrusting it away in a tiny bag she carried. It was as though she felt that the precious thing had been almost lost, and she must not run that risk with it again. And John Wakefield watched her, with all his ideas concerning her scattered.

Over and over again he told himself that here was a creature of the streets—someone scarcely even to be glanced at by the man who had loved Mary of the blue eyes; and then he would think of those other eyes that had been filled with tears at the mere reading of a childish letter. Who was she? What did it mean?

He paid his bill, and prepared to leave the place. The woman had paid her small reckoning, and with a smile and a nod to the waiter, who seemed to know her well and treated her almost with familiarity, went out of the restaurant. John Wakefield waited a moment or two, and then sauntered out after her; and at that moment she was simply something that had drifted across his path for a moment—and was gone.

Outside the woman was standing, irresolutely glancing to right and to left. The mere sight of her revived in John Wakefield's mind the memory of what he had seen; he glanced at her curiously, and was conscious that she was looking at him. She turned suddenly, and walked away.

¶

WITH no thought of following her, Wakefield walked in the same direction. He had time to burn, before going back to those lonely rooms of his, and one way was as good as another. Thus almost unconsciously he kept her in sight, as she sauntered slowly through streets that must have been grimly familiar to her. In one hand she carried the little bag in which the childish letter was; he wondered if she thought of that to-night.

After a time she seemed to become vaguely conscious that he was following her, and to resent it. She glanced over her shoulder once or twice, not in any sense of invitation, but as though dreading that he should get nearer to her. At last in a quiet street she stopped, and turned, and waited for him to come up.

"Why do you follow me?" she asked, quickly.

"I did not mean to follow you," he answered vaguely. "I think I was a little interested in you. I would not offend you or the world." He turned away.

"Stop!" she called quickly; and he turned, and walked back again. It happened that she was standing under a gas-lamp, so that again he saw her eyes.

"A little interested in me?" she asked, quietly. "You know what I am?"

"I think so," he said gently. "I think it was the letter—the child's letter. I did not mean even to look at it——"

She caught at the bag suddenly with her disengaged hand, as though to be sure that her treasure was safe; and then, as she raised her face again, into her eyes had crept a look that was wonderful. Love, and motherhood, and a great ache in her breast; it was all there, in just the look she turned upon him for a moment. And her eyes crinkled up softly at the corners, and smiled at him in the frankest fashion—bright eyes, that might almost have been the eyes of Mary who was dead.

"She's mine; she belongs to me," she whispered.

The look had been so wonderful that it moved John Wakefield to pry a little into the story. He began with an idle question. "Your's? What is her name?"

"Mary."

The name stabbed him, and tore open his wound afresh. Yet insensibly it drew him nearer to her—in pity for what she was, and in wonder about the child. She was opening the little bag with nervous fingers, and was struggling to get out of it that poor scrawled letter; half-hesitatingly she held it out to him, there in the quiet street.

"Perhaps you would like—like to read it?" she said. "She is only five—and a little bit; but she writes quite well—quite beautifully."

He gently thrust the letter away from him, touching her hand for a moment as he did so. "Perhaps it's a little too sacred for a stranger to see," he said. "Put it away—and take care of it."

She put away the scrap of paper—a little disappointed, as he thought, as though she would have liked him to see it. In some contrition—for, in remembrance of that sudden smile, and the look in her bright eyes, and the tears he had seen in them, the street seemed a dreadful wilderness—he said suddenly, "Would you like to tell me about her? I am more interested than you think."

They began to move slowly up and down the street, side by side. She kept at a little distance from him, now and then turning

her head quickly as she talked. It seemed to him, when he thought of it afterwards, as though she spoke to him from across some great gulf, or from an immense distance.

"I am younger than I look," she began, softly. "I was only nineteen when the child was born—child of sorrow and of shame. I had been too young to understand; God help me—I had had no mother. And somehow, although I was afraid, and had to hide myself, from the very first the mite crept into my heart—something wonderful—something that was mine, and mine alone. I think I forgot the shame of it in my love for the little child."

They walked a few yards side by side before she spoke again; John Wakefield, glancing at her, saw that her face wore again that transfigured look.

"She was nearly three years old when I met a man who loved me, and who asked me to marry him. He did not know about the child; she was hidden away with some good people in the country. The man was a good man, and I longed for rest and peace and shelter; I had had to work hard to keep myself and the baby. It seemed to me that I might marry him, and then might tell him about the child afterwards; he would understand. So I consented, and we were married, and for a time we were very happy."

"When did you tell him?" asked Wakefield.

"Not for a long time; I was afraid. He was rich, and there were a lot of relatives, who didn't like me. My husband was much older than I was, and there were certain things he was stern and unforgiving about. So I thought I would put it off as long as possible. In the meantime, as I had money to use as I liked, I had sent Mary to a school by the sea, where she was growing strong and beautiful; a good school, kept by women. I used to manage sometimes to steal away, and go and see her. On one of those visits I was watched—and my husband found out everything."

She said it in a hopeless way, with a little laugh at the end of it—quite as though that had summed up all her troubles.

"He turned me out of the house. He said awful things to me; and he had gathered about him a lot of his stern relatives; I was quite helpless. I went away without money or anything else—all in a moment; I was so afraid of the man. I've always been a weak, foolish sort of creature; that's why the world has bruised me and hurt me, I suppose."

"What happened then?" asked Wakefield, gently.

"I had sworn to myself, when first the baby came to me," she went on, without answering his question, "that nothing should ever touch her, to harm her. Long before I married him, I used to swear that on my knees every night, beside her cot—just as other happier women pray. I couldn't pray, I was too sinful; but I made that oath in Heaven. So, though I was starving myself, I kept the child at the school, and paid for her. She's there now."

The man stopped dead in the street, staring at her. She had stopped also, again with that little proud lift of the chin; the bright eyes were crinkled up at the corners, and she was positively laughing.

"He turned me into the streets; he didn't mind what became of me; but he couldn't hurt the child. That's the hideous blunder men make always; they can't understand what a woman will go through for that which is her own. I might have gone to people who would have made him do something for me; but I thought of what he had said, and I felt I couldn't do that. I tried to work; but people I had worked for before had forgotten me, or had filled my place. And then——"

Again that little, hopeless, helpless gesture; no words were needed for the tragedy. He looked at her in a wonder too deep for expression; he could not understand now how he could ever have felt disgust when he first looked at her. "And you have managed to keep the child there—at that school?" he asked at last.

They had moved on together again; she looked round at him quickly in triumph. "Yes, I have been careful; in a sense I have been lucky. Mary will grow up pure and wonderful; Mary will never know. She writes her little letters to me; and on the days the little letters come I go back to the place I call home—and I go alone."

They parted at the end of the street. He remembered afterwards that a keen and bitter wind had sprung up on that spring night, so that the woman shivered a little as she turned and looked about her.

"Good-night—and thank you for listening to what must seem a silly little story," she said, wistfully. "But, you see, I don't have anyone to talk to—and the baby is a long way away. I don't want her to see me

too often; I don't want anyone to know about me."

John Wakefield had put his hand in his pocket; but at the rattle of coins she had drawn back quickly from him. "Not from you; it would spoil it all," she said. "Good night—and God bless you!"

She was gone—out into the shadows of the wider streets; John Wakefield stood alone, looking after her. And for a moment it seemed that Mary of the blue eyes was more near to him than she had been since the hour of her death.

¶

VAGUELY, in his loneliness, the remembrance of the woman swept from time to time through his mind. Always wandering, hopelessly and fearfully, through the streets; always with a little letter in a childish hand carried with her. Gradually, however, the memory of that faded, and the man forgot. It had been an incident in his life—a something he vaguely remembered; but no more than that. The summer was past, and the winter had gone, and another summer was waning; and the little, poor, pathetic incident was gone from his mind.

There came a night in late autumn when John Wakefield wandered abroad restlessly through the streets of London, and, by the merest chance, came again to that little restaurant in a side street in which he had sat once before. It seemed as unprosperous as ever, and the table at which she had sat a long time before was empty. Suddenly the remembrance of that night came over him like a flood; he seemed to see her sitting there, with the childish letter spread out before her on the table. Somehow or other the meal was tasteless; the man got up, and paid his reckoning and went out. The voice of the coming winter was in the streets; he shivered as he went along.

Mechanically he took his way alone through streets he had walked on that night when a wanderer had told him her story. And as he went a shadow followed—at first as if to overtake him, and then in the vain hope that presently she might attract his attention. A shabby shadow, yet with eyes that had once been bright, and had crinkled into long-forgotten laughter at the corners.

She came up with him in that street where once before she had talked with him; and now she swayed, and would have fallen if he had not put an arm about her. And for a moment, forgetful of everything else, she clung to him—poor, broken wretch, drowned in the great sea of London—and whispered haltingly that she had looked for him.

"I'm a little—a little excited," she murmured, when she was more calm. "Something wrong with my heart, they tell me; they talk nonsense about my going off at any moment. I can't do that; there's the baby—isn't there?"

She was half-hysterical, in her amazed delight at finding him again; she swayed upon her feet, and laughed, and murmured something about it's being all right now. Her face in the lamplight was drawn and ghastly. Horror and pity moving him, he spoke to her gently—persuasively.

"Listen. You are ill—more ill than you think. I can take you now to a place where you will be looked after, and properly cared for—a place where there are doctors and nurses——"

She struggled with him fiercely, and broke away, and faced him with a strange courage and a stranger determination. "I won't go," she said. "They might ask me questions—they might find out who I am, and what I had been. I won't go. I shall be all right directly.

Scarcely knowing what to do with her, John Wakefield walked slowly along by her side, glancing at her anxiously from time to time. She was very weak and very ill; yet he dreaded to think what she would do if he should try to get her to a hospital.

They came to the river. There were seats there, where forlorn wretches slept the night away, and perhaps dreamed of pleasant fields and whispering trees, until they woke to the horror of another day of life. John Wakefield and the woman found a bench that was deserted, and sat down there; and now she leaned back exhausted, with a hand to her heart.

"Many and many a night I've walked through the streets, looking for you—hoping I might find you," she faltered at last. "You were the one man in all God's cruel world that ever understood. Why was it?"

"Perhaps because I had loved a woman—and had lost her," he answered, gently. "Dying, she prayed that I would be good to all women."

A constable strolled past, with a glance for a moment at the well-dressed man and the shabby woman; she seemed to quail a little until he was out of sight. John Wakefield, after a pause, asked a question.

" What of the child ? "

She turned wide eyes upon him—eyes of appeal ; her hand went up to her throat, as though she had a difficulty in breathing. " I—I've failed," she whispered brokenly. " I haven't sent them any money for a long time ; I haven't had any to send. They would not turn out a mite like that—they are women. They would look after her, for a little time at least." And then her head went down on her arm, on the back of the seat, and she wailed out hysterically—" Dear God—I did my best—I did my best ! "

" Listen," said John Wakefield, bending nearer to her. " If you will come with me now to that place I spoke of, where you will be looked after, I swear to you that I will see that all is well with the baby, and that she shan't know anything about you. Will you do that ? "

She lifted her head, and looked at him, with her lips parted, and her eyes staring as though she did not understand. And then suddenly fell a-weeping bitterly, and caught at his hands and kissed them, and began a rambling talk of what she would do when the summer came again, and she was warm, and was better in health. Humbly she told him that she would do anything he wished—would go with him to any place—if only he would save the child. And in the midst of it started to her feet, and clutched at her throat again, and fell back on to the seat.

The constable was far off ; save for two men, with their heads nodding upon their breasts, on the next seat, there was no one about. The hour was very late. John Wakefield turned quickly to the woman, and lifted one hanging hand, and felt for a pulse that was not there ; slipped a hand into her dress, and found no heart beat. He remembered what she had said—poor, forlorn creature—about the child ; he remembered how she had fought against the idea of going to any place where they might question her. He got up hurriedly, and prepared to leave her. After all, nothing mattered now ; for her the story was ended.

At the last moment, when he had gone a few yards, he walked back to where she was sitting ; on the seat lay a shabby little bag, such as he had seen her carry once before. He opened it ; there was no money in it, but, folded up small, was what looked like a letter.

In his rooms, when he read the little, scrawled childish thing, he found that it gave as its heading the name of a school in a seaside town. He had been so shocked and so moved by what had happened that he scarcely knew what to do ; there was only one clear thought in his mind—that he must find the child, and must see that all was well with her. The dreary shadow that had followed him seemed to be with him still ; the hands that had rested in his, and had clutched them convulsively, seemed to implore that. He knew, too, that Mary of the blue eyes would have wished that.

Two days later he found himself in the reception room of Minerva Lodge, awaiting the advent of Miss Gooch, the proprietress of that highly-respectable boarding establishment for young ladies. He looked round the room, and saw the hard furniture, and the hard books that were apparently never read, and the globes that were apparently never used ; and a cold, sick feeling of fear came over him. Was it possible that the child had been kept there out of charity ?

The door opened, and Miss Gooch came in. She was a thin, angular lady in a black silk dress, and with hard, gold bangles on her wrists that seemed specially manufactured for the purpose of mortifying her flesh as much as possible. Her hair was smoothly parted on her forehead, and her face was one that could never be imagined for a moment to have a smile upon it.

John Wakefield stated his case. " A—a friend of mine has her little daughter at school here. The—friend has unexpectedly died—quite suddenly ; I have agreed to be responsible for the child. I am perfectly certain in my own mind," added John ingratiatingly, " that the child is well cared for ; I merely wished to make her acquaintance, and to pay what is, I believe, owing for her maintenance. The child's name is Mary Barber."

Miss Gooch clasped and unclasped her hands, and opened and shut her mouth once or twice ; her face was curiously mottled and flushed. " I am sorry, Mr. Wakefield," she said at last—" but the child is not here."

" Not here ! " he echoed blankly.

" The time came when I could get no answers to my letters to the mother, and the bills remained unpaid," replied Miss Gooch. " It was scarcely to be expected that I could keep the child here under those circumstances ; I was obliged to send her away. Of course, if I had known that payment would be made——"

" Where have you sent her ? " demanded John Wakefield sternly. He was thinking

of the woman who had died beside the river —that river that had perhaps flowed between flower-spangled banks, years before, for her, when she had been young and innocent.

" I was compelled to send her to an institution such as is provided for persons in a state of penury," Miss Gooch gulped out.

" You sent her to the workhouse ? " said Wakefield bitterly. " It would seem that my dead friend made a mistake in believing that her child was safe in such hands as yours. Perhaps you will be good enough to give me the name of the place, in order that I may go and find her."

Miss Gooch, between protesting that she had done the best she could, and that she would be only too pleased to receive the dear child back again, gave him the information for which he asked ; and he went straight off to a dreary-looking building on the outskirts of the town. The matron of the place received him in a cheerless room, and listened stolidly to his request ; she shook her head when he had finished.

" The guardians were given to understand that the child came from London," she said, " and therefore she was naturally sent off there, with a batch of others. I'll give you the address, if you wish."

John Wakefield had got his teeth into the matter now, as it were ; he meant to find the child. It occurred to him that this baby, seen through the eyes of her dead mother as something wonderful, might, after all, be only ordinary and commonplace. But he had given his word, and he would not go back. Moreover, he would do this thing as Mary of the blue eyes would have liked him to do it.

He visited that place in London ; he heard, as he waited, the hum of many little voices in the pauper school. The woman who came to talk to him answered his questions readily enough ; there certainly was a child of that name in the school, drafted on to them from the seaside town he had visited ; the name had been given as that of Mary Barber. Would he care to see the child ?

" I'm going to make arrangements to take her away," said John Wakefield. " I knew her mother, who is dead ; I'm going to look after the little one in future. I want to do the thing in my own way," he went on, a little confusedly ; " I want her to leave the taint of this place behind her for ever. Will you mind if I send the nurse she is to have here to fetch her ? "

" When all arrangements are made with the Guardians, you can, of course, do what you like," answered the matron.

So, without seeing the child, John Wakefield set about to accomplish the thing in his own way. He got a nurse who was highly recommended ; he fitted up a room as a nursery. And then, when everything was completed, he arranged with the woman to buy a complete outfit, and to go and fetch the child.

" Take everything," said John Wakefield a little brusquely ; " they'll let you change her things at the workhouse. I don't want her to bring away anything that she has ever had there."

Then, when the nurse was gone on her errand, John Wakefield began to wonder whether, after all, this was wise. Common sense whispered that it was nothing to do with him ; and the poor, forlorn creature of the streets had died in the streets, and was done with. The child was in an excellent institution provided for that purpose——

Steps upon the stairs ; a child's quick voice speaking in eager enquiry. John Wakefield stood up, and watched the door of the room, and waited and wondered.

He need not have feared. The daintily-dressed, pretty creature that came shyly towards him was something very wonderful in that cheerless room ; and, when she smiled at him, her eyes crinkled up at the corners divinely—just like the eyes of a woman he had met in a windy London street, John Wakefield suddenly dropped to his knees, and took the mite close in his embrace, and murmured a name to her that was sacred—

" Mary ! "

It was quite late when John Wakefield softly opened the door of the room that had been turned into a nursery, and peeped in. The nurse was not there, and the child was sleeping—flushed and rosy—in her cot. As he went a step or two into the room, Wakefield stopped, and stared at something else he thought he saw.

Was that a poor, shabby shadow standing beside the cot ? Was there something there that raised its head with a little, proud lift of the chin, and smiled at him out of bright eyes that crinkled up at the corners ?

He came out of the room, and closed the door—and left them together.

Women in Love

(*Extracts from famous Love Letters.*)

Henrietta Vernon (Lady Grosvenor)

(*To Henry Frederick, Duke of Cumberland*)

1790.

I'M going to teise my Dear little Friend with more of my stupid letter I've not seen Mr. Croper since yesterday Morning he did not come home from his Brothers till I was asleep last night. I cannot think what the Duce he is about,—I suppose by his not coming up to see me Mr. Gro——r has censur'd one part of the Letter . . .

O my dearest Soul I've just received Two of the dearest letters in the world from you, how can I, I cannot express my feelings of gratitude and Love for you, your dear heart is so safe with *me* and feels every motion mine does, with you, how happy your dearest letters make me I'm so much obliged to you for saying you will take care of your dear Health because I desire you, do my dearest Friend I entreat you, and I'll do the same . . . my dearest Soul I send you Ten Thousand kisses I wish I could give them . . . God bless you *my dearest Dear life I shall ever love you* . . .

Lydia Fraser

(*To her Fiancé, Hugh Miller*)

MY own Hugh, 1836.

I am tired, tired of being away from you. You have no idea of the frivolous fashions to which sex and fashion subject us. I do nothing all day, and hear nothing, yet I am obliged to take the time from sleep which I devote to you. . . . It is morning, but I am not beside you on the leafy hill, with the blue water shimmering at our feet. When shall we be there again?

Lady Hamilton's Last Letter to Lord Nelson

(*He was dead before it reached him*)

Canterbury, October 8, 1805.

DEAREST Husband of My Heart,—You are all in this world to your Emma—may God send you victory and Honour (and) soon to your *Emma, Horatia and paradise Merton*, for when you are there it will be paradise. *My* own Nelson. May God prosper you and preserve you for the sake of your affectionate

Emma.

Elizabeth Barrett

(*To Robert Browning, before Elopement*)

September 19, 1846.

AT from half-past three to four, then—four will not, I suppose, be too late. I will not write more—*I cannot*. By to-morrow at this time I shall have *you* only, to love me - my beloved!

You *only!* As if one said *God only*. And we shall have *Him* beside, I pray of Him . .

Do you pray for me to-night, Robert? Pray for me, and love me, that I may have courage, feeling both.

Your own, Ba.

The boxes are *safely sent*. Wilson has been perfect to me. And I . . . calling her " timid " and afraid of her timidity! I begin to think that none are so bold as the timid. when they are fairly roused.

DOROTHY OSBORNE

(To her Fiancé, William Temple, after a quarrel)

1653.

IF you have ever loved me, do not refuse the last request I shall ever make you; 'tis to preserve yourself from the violence of your passion. Vent it all upon me; call me and think me what you please; make me, if it be possible, more wretched than I am. I'll bear it without the least murmur. Nay, I deserve it all, for had you never seen me you had certainly been happy . . . I am the most unfortunate woman breathing, but I was never false. No; I call Heaven to witness that if my life could satisfy for the least injury my fortune has done you . . . I would lay it down with greater joy than any person ever received a crown; and if I ever forgot what I owe you or ever entertain a thought of kindness for any person in the world besides, may I live a long and miserable life. 'Tis the greatest curse I can invent: if there be a greater, may I feel it. This is all I can say.

LADY MARY PIERREPOINT (AFTERWARDS WORTLEY MONTAGU)

(To Edward Wortley Montagu, before Elopement)

Friday night, 15 *August*, 1712.

I TREMBLE for what we are doing. Are you sure you will love me for ever? Shall we never repent? I fear and I hope.

I foresee all that will happen on this occasion. I shall incense my family in the highest degree. The generality of the world will blame my conduct, and the relations and friends of —— will invent a thousand stories of me. Yet, 'tis possible you may recompense everything to me.

In this letter which I am fond of, you promise me all that I wish. Since I writ so far, I received your Friday letter.

I will be only yours, and I will do what you please.

You shall hear from me again to-morrow, not to contradict, but to give some directions. My resolution is taken. Love me and use me well.

SYDNEY OWENSON (LADY MORGAN)

(To her Fiancé, Thomas Charles Morgan)

October 31, 1811.

I AM not half such a little rascal as you suppose; the best feelings only have detained me from you; and feelings better than the *best* will bring me back to you. I must be more or less than woman to resist tenderness, goodness, excellence, like yours, and I am simply woman, aye, dear, "every inch a woman." I feel a little kind of tingling about the heart, at once more feeling myself nestled in yours; do you remember? . . . God bless you, love. S. O.

Your song is charming; you are a clever wretch, and I love you more for your talents than your virtues, you *thing of the world*. What put it into your stupid head that I would not return at Christmas? Did I ever say so, blockhead?

Well, I have only the old *story* to *tell*, no more than yourself—

And I *loves* you, and you loves me,
And oh! how happy we shall be.

JANE WELSH CARLYLE

(To Thomas Carlyle)

Seaforth, Tuesday, July 14, 1846.

OH! my dear Husband, Fortune has played me such a cruel trick this day! But it is all right now; and I do not even feel any resentment against Fortune for the suffocating misery of the last two hours . . .

Not a line from you on my Birthday—on the fifth day! I did not burst out crying—did not faint—did not *do* anything absurd, so far as I know, but I walked back again, without speaking a word; and with such a tumult of wretchedness in my heart as you who know me can conceive. And then I shut myself in my own room to fancy everything that was most tormenting. Were you, finally, so out of patience with me that you had resolved to write to me no more at all? Had you gone to Addiscombe and found no leisure there to remember my existence? Were you taken ill, so ill that you *could* not write? That last idea made me mad to get off to the railway, and back to London. Oh, mercy! what a two hours I had of it! And just when I was at my wit's end, I heard Julia crying out thro' the house: "Mrs. Carlyle, Mrs. Carlyle! are you there? Here is a letter for you!" And so there was after all! The postmistress had overlooked it, and given it to Robert, when he went afterwards, not knowing that we had been . . . I will try to believe—oh, why cannot I believe it, once for all—that, with all my faults and follies, I *am* "dearer to you than any earthly creature!" . . .

Your own,

JANE CARLYLE.

CHARLOTTE CARPENTER

(To her Fiancé, (Sir) Walter Scott)

Carlisle, October 25 (1797).

INDEED, Mr. Scott, I am by no means pleased with all this writing. I have told you how much I dislike it, and yet you still persist in asking me to write, and that by return of post.

O! you are really quite out of your senses. I should not have indulged you in that whim of yours, had you not given me that hint that my silence gives an air of mystery . . .

Before I conclude this famous epistle, I will give you a little hint—that is, not to put so many *musts* in your letters—it is beginning *rather too soon;* and another thing is, that I take the liberty not to mind them much, but I expect you to mind me.

You *must* take care of yourself, you *must* think of me and believe me yours sincerely.

MRS. H. L. PIOZZI (AGED 73)

(To William A. Conway, a young actor)

Feb. 2, 1820.

I WOULD not hurry you for the world. . . . Take your own time, and do it in your own way; or rather suffer Nature to do it—that has done so much for you; more, I do think, than for any mortal man. See what a scar the surgeon, however skilful, would have made in that beautiful neck, while Nature's preparation, thro' previous agony, made suppurating ease come on unfelt; and the wound heals almost without a cicatrix—does it not? So will it be with the mind. My own hasty folly—and my "*violent love outran the Pauser Reason.*"

Lady Augusta Murray

(To Prince Augustus, son of George III.)

March, 1793.

THEN, my treasure, you say you will talk of honour to him. There is no honour in the case; if there is I will not marry you. I love you, and I have reason to hope and believe you love me; but honour in the sense you take it is out of the question.

I cannot bear to owe my happiness to anything but affection; and all promises, though sacred in our eyes and in those of heaven, shall not oblige you to do anything towards me that can in the least prejudice your future interests.

As for honour, with the meaning Mr. Gunn (a clergyman in Rome who ultimately married them) will annex to it, I am ashamed to say I fancy it—he will imagine I have been your mistress, and that humanity, commonly termed honour, now induces you to pity me, and so veil my follies, by an honourable marriage.

My own beloved Prince, forgive me if I am warm on this subject. I wish you to feel you owe me nothing; and whatever I owe you I wish to owe to your love, and to your good opinion, but no other principle.

Tell Mr. Gunn, my own Augustus, that you love me . . . but don't let him imagine that I have been vile. Do this only, my love, but pray take care of the character of your wife, of your Augusta.

The Same

(A few days later)

MY treasure, my dearest life and love, how can I refuse you? And yet dare I trust to the happiness your letters promised me? You shall come if you wish it. You shall do as you like; my whole soul rejoices in the assurances of your love, and to your exertions I will trust . . .

To be yours to-night seems a dream that I cannot make out; the whole day have I been plunged in misery, and now to awake to joy is a felicity beyond my ideas of bliss. I doubt its success; but do as you will; I am what you will; your will must be mine, and no will can ever be dearer to me, more mine, than that of my Augustus, my lover, my all.

Lucile-Aurore Dupin (George Sand), aged 60

(To Gustave Flaubert)

DEAR FLAUBERT, *Paris*, 15 *March*, 1864.

. . . I am sorry not to have said adieu to you; but as I return soon, I hope that you will not have forgotten me and that you will let me read something of your own also.

You were so good and so sympathetic to me at the first performance of *Villemer* that I no longer admire only your admirable talent, I love you with all my heart.

George Sand.

Palaisea, 14 *May*, 1866.

I kiss the two great diamonds which adorn your face.

Jorge Sens.

Paris, 31 *August*, 1866.

AND then you, you are such a dear kind boy, big man that you are, and I love you with all my heart. My head is full of Rouen, of monuments and queer houses. All of that seen with you strikes me doubly . . . G. Sand.

The Countess's Carriage

War and a woman's way in old France

By H. B. MARRIOT WATSON

TOWARDS the end of May, 1813, Wellington, at the head of his veteran and war-worn troops, crossed the boundaries of Spain, and, turning in the saddle, waved farewell to Portugal for ever. Thirty days later, on the twenty-first of June, his army in three divisions descended upon the French in the plains of Vittoria. Joseph Buonaparte was in retreat towards France by the great road to Bayonne, and was here driven to bay. He had in his possession not only a million sterling in money, but also the treasures of art which he had amassed during the last eight years in Madrid. The French camp was a camp of luxury, filled with wagons of spoil, and adorned by the presence of innumerable ladies who were withdrawing with the army of the vanquished Emperor. With the victory of Vittoria, fought almost on the spot on which in the fourteenth century the Black Prince had won Spain for Pedro the Cruel, the yoke of the Buonapartes was lifted from that unhappy country.

Captain Willoughby Sword, hatless, breathless, and waving a broken sword, entered the little village of Gamarra Mayor with his shattered company. It was this movement of General Graham's that was the decisive action of the day, for by his capture of the village the road to Bayonne was closed and the French retreat was cut off. The news spread like fire across a prairie, rousing a panic in the French, but of that Captain Sword knew nothing. He was but an item in the day's plans, and, knowing what he had to do and having done it, knew no more. Who knew where Wellington was? But wherever he was it was all right, and whatever he had planned he had done. Captain Sword's pressing need, which occupied all his mind as he tumbled in at the village street, was a draught of something cooling. The sun was still high in heaven, and it was a mid-summer day.

Across the river the guns were booming, and the English troops of Robertson's brigade, who had arrived before Sword, were engaged in sharp-shooting across the bridge, which was held at the other end by the discomfited French. Captain Sword had his orders, which concerned the outlet from the village along the great road to Bayonne; yet what could happen, and who could escape when the British held the village and the French lay across the river in such a condition of disorder? He stayed at the first inn, fetched out the host with a rap of his sword hilt, and drank a long draught of rough wine. It was as nectar to his parched throat. Away along the levels of the plateau the vineyards were swimming in the haze of the summer afternoon. The breath of heaven struck him warmly as the breath of fire. The sweat rolled down the faces of his men. Sword bade the inn-keeper supply them with wine, which he did obsequiously. As he stood there a sergeant came round the corner of the street, and saluted. "There is a carriage stopped in the road, sir," said he, "and the lady is in a storm of anger, and calls for the officer in charge."

"She refuses to be stayed?" said Sword, with a grin.

"She declares she must go forward, and demands to see you," said the sergeant.

"I will come," said the captain, shortly, and forthwith wheeled off with his party.

Where a narrow street emerged upon the wider mainroad he found the carriage in the custody of a number of his men, and with his long steps went brusquely up to it. A lady's face was at the window, marked at once with agitation and anger. Instantly she broke forth in a torrent of words.

"So, M. le Capitaine, you wage war on defenceless women and the helpless wounded?" she said, indignantly, as her handsome eyes flashed on him. "'Tis a new duty of warfare to waylay my sex. There lies your work—there—over there!" she exclaimed, with a gesture towards the

Zamorra, and the plain from which the tumult of cannon was proceeding. Beyond the intermittent rattle of musketry on the bridge hard by, away in the distance the guns were lowing like cattle, dully, and in a melancholy way.

Captain Sword took off the native hat which he had secured from the innkeeper, and stood bareheaded, a pleasant smile on his face, deprecating impatience.

"Madam," said he, "alas! I would I were there, rather than here, incurring your anger. My orders are to close the road, yet that will not, doubtless, be for long. Yet I must ask you to go back for the present. You shall be in perfect safety and——"

"Monsieur," she interrupted, hotly, "do you know what you would do? You would stop a wounded man travelling to a dying mother. My faith, is that English gallantry? That he will arrive to find a corpse! Is that my Lord Wellington's way?"

"Madam," said Sword, in some embarrassment, "it goes to my heart to deny you. But you must go back. Doubtless the detention will be brief. I will send a messenger to my General."

Her eyes were fixed on his, and he seemed to read in them her scorn and contempt. She was pale, and her auburn hair seemed to reflect an added beauty in that delicate complexion. Her face was featured as a child's, save for the bold bow of the lips, which moved feverishly. She was of some five and twenty years, and of a fragile loveliness. Sword admired as he gazed and quaked. It was at the threatened outbreak that he quaked, for he was a man of firm hand and would not budge. He had no doubts, but he did not enjoy a woman's anger. But now she surprised him by her sudden acquiescence. Her glance flitted around the soldiery, and she sank back.

"We are your prisoners, Monsieur," she said, coldly. "I shall remember the English."

"Ah, Madam," he made answer, "I am the most miserable man. I would I were receiving the bullets of General Reille yonder."

She made a gesture out of the window with her hand, as if dismissing him impatiently, and he gave orders to the coachman to turn. The carriage went slowly back into the village.

At the door of the house before which the carriage stopped Captain Sword assisted the lady to alight. At first she would have rejected his hand, but on a swift impulse took it.

"Ah, Monsieur," she breathed in his ear, "you are so hard. God keep you from the same agony! He is my brother."

Sword was murmuring his regret, and was preparing to assist the other occupant of the carriage whom he had not as yet seen, when a soldier rushed up in excitement.

"The King was here, and has escaped, sir," he cried. "Buonaparte has escaped."

Sword gave a start of astonishment, and the lady clutched his arm.

"What says he?" she demanded, eagerly. "Buonaparte—'tis so you call the King. What of him?"

Sword met her eyes. "It is said the King was here and has escaped," he said.

"'Tis true," she said, ecstatically. "His Majesty was here. I spoke with him but an hour ago. Oh, has he escaped? Thanks to God! Oh, Monsieur, I thank the good God."

She clasped her hands together. Captain Sword eyed her coolly, but with admiration.

"If he has escaped," said he, "he is beyond my power to deal with. My duty, Madam, unhappily lies with those who have not escaped. Pray, allow me to help your brother into the house."

"Yes, yes, you are good," she said, quickly. "Forgive me for my temper and chagrin. I was wrong. You had your orders to obey. But His Majesty has escaped. Frédèric, my heart, M. le Capitaine will help you. We are his—ah, Monsieur, guests, I will say, not prisoners."

"Madam, you honour and shame me," said Sword, bowing.

The lady stooped in the doorway of the carriage, and pulled a wrapping round the form of the man that sat huddled there.

"He is in a fever, Monsieur," she said over his shoulder. "He was wounded three days ago. Ah, this war—this war!" Sword put her gently aside.

"Pray, Madam," he said, and putting out his hand touched the man.

"Can you stand, Monsieur?" he enquired courteously.

The answer came somewhat muffled to him. "Yes, Monsieur, I can walk, if you will be so good as to give me your arm."

When the invalid had alighted with difficulty he leaned heavily against the English captain who supported him, while his sister tenderly adjusted the wrappings

about his head and shoulders once more. They entered the house, and the invalid subsided in a chair, his face covered by a white hand. Sword regarded him gravely.

" I will send word to our surgeon and he will see your brother," he said.

" Oh, you are good," she cried, taking both his hands, " And you will do as you said, and get us passes to go forward."

" I will despatch a messenger to the General at once," he returned with a little smile at her. " He shall be put in possession of such facts as I have."

For a second she searched his face, and then her glance dropped. A little sigh went through her, and she let his hands go. The electric thrill which Sword had experienced tingled gently away. He bowed and moved to the door.

" Monsieur," she called, in her eager voice, " You will come back and tell me? I trust my brother will be in a condition to thank you himself when you return. Will it be an hour? "

" Possibly an hour, madam," he said, and then " and what name shall I give to the General? "

" Le Comte de Dessourier and his sister, Maline," she said.

He was conscious of her red, full lips and the strong arch of her chin, and then his eyes travelled to the childlike eyes.

" Maline," murmured musically in his ears. He bowed and left her.

¶

OUTSIDE he called to the sergeant. " Put a guard at this house," said he, " before and behind, but at a distance not to give annoyance. Watch it carefully."

Then he went off down the village with his swinging strides. It was more than an hour before he returned, and the guards reported to him.

" Nothing has occurred, sir. Nothing has been seen."

Sword passed on and, hesitating a moment, knocked on the door firmly. It was opened by the Comtesse Maline, whose wide blue eyes gleamed with pleasure as she recognised him.

" Monsieur, you have brought us permission? " she cried, eagerly.

" Madame, you must have patience," he answered regretfully. " I have had no reply yet from the General. 'Tis difficult to reach him on so broad a field."

Her face fell, and she stood looking out into the street, as if oblivious of him; but immediately recovering, sighed, and smiled a little melancholy smile which was charming.

" Monsieur, my brother at all costs would wish to thank you. He is recovered from the shock somewhat."

Sword winched; for though it was delicately phrased, and indeed may not have been intended, nevertheless the shock was the arrest.

" I shall be proud to make M. le Comte's better acquaintance," he murmured.

Maline de Dessourier held the door open for him to pass in, and he entered a room in which stood a table set out with dishes. The appointments were simple, but struck him at once as being singularly good for so outlandish a place. A carafe of red wine was on the table; a plate of fruit, and some dishes containing cold viands completed the arrangements.

" We were disturbed, Monsieur, by the arrival of the English," explained the lady. " Frédèric and I were about to eat our poor déjeuner, such as this place affords, when the alarm was given. We had thought to escape ere you arrived, and reach Bayonne. 'Twas but yesterday we heard of our mother's illness. She lies at Monnix, twenty leagues short of Paris. 'Tis a long journey, and across those hills! " She sighed again deeply, but pointed to a chair.

" Monsieur, you must be hot and thirsty —maybe hungry. Will you join us. My brother will be here shortly. It is necessary to eat to live, Monsieur, and we have a long afternoon before us by your kind leave."

Captain sat down. He was both hungry and thirsty, and admitted it frankly. He ate and drank, and chatted with this beautiful woman with the child's eyes. The afternoon was sultry, and the windows were open upon the street. Maline de Dessourier rose from the table and passed into a room at the back.

" Monsieur, Frédèric comes," she said on her return. " But he comes slowly. He must be refreshed for his journey, is it not so? You are good to us."

Sword winced, for it was by no means certain to him that the General would mend his orders for the sake of one wounded Frenchman. War is ruthless. Yet he had a feeling of satisfaction to be there after the arduous work of the day, in the presence of a beautiful woman with bright eyes, when so many of his companions were still

involved in the fight. But the great battle had practically deserted the village, and swept elsewhere. Only across the bridge did Reille gallantly maintain his defence. So at his ease Captain Sword sipped his glass and talked.

"Mademoiselle," said he, for upon her fingers she wore no rings, "Mademoiselle, war is always terrible. I trust this may be the last of it."

"You have been long here, Monsieur?" she inquired.

"Six years, Mademoiselle," he answered; "and my mother is dead since, as I trust yours will not be."

"Ah, Monsieur, you can feel for us. I knew your heart was right. Mon Dieu, how sad for you! Your mother dead and you away, so many leagues! My heart bleeds for you, and for us, M. le Capitaine. Ah, forget not us."

Captain Sword stirred uncomfortably, but the wine was of an excellent flavour and body. Surely it was not of that rude country vintage. His eyes, always alert and eager, encountered hers across the table. In the profundity of that blue gaze he lost himself. Tears seemed to well in the childish orbs; the locket on her bosom trembled. She sighed and cast down her lashes.

"To the end of the war!" said he, softly, and raised his glass.

The girl raised hers also, and drained it, setting it back upon the table awkwardly.

"Yes, let us drink that," she cried. "To the end of all violence and all bloodshed!" She went swiftly to the open window, through which the bellowing of the cannon drifted. She leaned forth, and the declining sun struck richly upon her pale face, enlivening it with colour. It shone too upon the bright hair till it was as the aureole of a saint.

"You will let us go, Monsieur, as soon as the answer comes?" she said, softly, and without turning her head.

"So soon as I have permission I will speed you on your way right gladly," he said, and after a little breath, and in a low voice, "yet not too gladly."

She shot a glance at him, which interrogated him silently for a moment, and then she looked away.

"Ah, here is Frédèric," she said, and went forward swiftly.

Sword got up and turned. He saw advancing with difficulty, and leaning on a stick, a young man, with his arm in a sling, slight, of medium height and pallid, and bearing marks of resemblance to his companion. This was obviously the Comte de Dessourier. Captain Sword bowed. He had thought the man he assisted from the carriage would have been bulkier than this slim youth, but of course, he had been enwrapped in blankets.

"We are both indebted to your kindness, M. le Capitaine," said the young man with a cold civility, unlike his sister's. "And I was unwilling to leave without acquainting you so in person."

Captain Sword could barely suppress a smile at this calm assumption of a permission to leave, but he only bowed gravely.

"I trust it may be arranged satisfactorily, Monsieur," said he.

"Monsieur is waiting, Frédèric," said his sister.

De Dessourier sat down painfully, stretching out his leg. "'Twas an affair with your troops, Monsieur," he explained politely to Sword. "I have unhappily been unable to take part in the affairs lately. It is my misfortune. Monsieur has doubtless been more fortunate?"

It struck Sword as odd that he should be deemed by a Frenchman more fortunate for having been able to fight with Frenchmen. But there was, of course, a point of view in it, and he assented.

"But I am weary of fighting, M. le Comte," he said.

"But no?" exclaimed the young man, his eyes lighting. "You are weary of so glorious a career, Monsieur, in which I am sure you have distinguished yourself!"

"There is little glory, and there are many knocks," said Sword, adding, "and many disagreeable duties."

The lady flushed faintly, but her brother made as if to argue the question with heat, when suddenly dropping his arm he fell back in his chair, swinging limply. Captain Sword rose in alarm, and Maline de Dessourier cried out. She was first at her brother's side, and kneeled beside him, fingering his wrist and calling on him with agitation. Captain Sword felt the pulse of the wounded man.

"Reassure yourself, Mademoiselle," said he, "He has only fainted. Come, we will soon have him round."

The Comte came to under their administrations, and opened his eyes. He struggled to sit up.

"A thousand pardons, Monsieur," he

said, " for this désagrément. I am still weak."

" Monsieur, Monsieur ! " said Maline, pitifully, seizing the Englishman's hand. Her eyes, like a child's in pain, swimming with tears, besought him. He sat down, and rapped his fingers on the table with a frown. Across the table Maline regarded him anxiously, but she said nothing.

" I doubt if you're fit for travel, Monsieur," said Sword presently.

" To know I was on the road would make me well," said the count, simply. He was deathly pale, and seemed to be suffering.

" Mademoiselle," said the Englishman slowly, to the girl. " My orders are obdurate. Nothing and no one, not even a cat, is to pass on the Bayonne road. That only a word from the General can break. But this I promise—that if there is no message by seven o'clock you shall be free to go to Pampeluna."

She sprang forward, and then stopped suddenly, the light in her eyes struggling with something else.

" You are disobeying your orders for us ? " she cried.

" My orders referred to the Bayonne Road," said Sword, in a short, grim voice.

" Ah ! But——" she ceased. " Monsieur I thank you," she said in a low voice, and, as if to conceal her emotion, slipped from the room.

The Count, too, offered his sincere thanks, but there was undoubtedly something of acidity in his feeling towards Englishmen, courteous and correct as was his demeanour. Sword left the house without seeing the sister again.

He waited at the inn for instructions, and at half-past six received a report from the sentries about the house. A carriage had drawn up in front of the house. What were the Captain's orders ?

" The carriage may remain, and no interference with it or the occupants of the house is to take place. But the carriage must not be allowed to move."

He waited again until the clock struck seven, transacting various pieces of business, and then walked once more to the house. The carriage was still before the door. He went up and knocked, but a voice called to him softly from behind, and, turning he saw the Countess Maline's face in the window of the carriage.

" You do not blame us, Monsieur ? " she said, softly. " We have been on thorns to be gone. So we have waited here like children in a coach that will not move."

She laughed gently. " Mademoiselle," he said in his light, quick way, " the coach shall move at last." His eyes were fixed on her intently and hers on him. He gave an order to the coachman.

" I trust M. le Comte will find health again and his mother well."

She made no answer to this, but still held him with her gaze, which seemed to have a touch of sadness he had not looked for. The carriage passed away.

¶

HALF-AN-HOUR later Captain Sword received an unexpected visit from the Colonel-in-Charge at the Bridge on the Zamorra.

" Captain," said he, hastily, " there is a rumour that the King took refuge in Gamarra Mayor, so as to be on the road to Bayonne in case of defeat. Instructions have come to make a systematic search."

" It is true—I have heard the rumour," said Sword. " But he escaped just before we got in."

The Colonel shook his head. " No ; we have prisoners who say that he did not pass over the bridge with the troops. He was left behind, owing to an accident. A French nobleman and his sister. It is said——"

He broke off, as an exclamation broke from the younger man.

Captain Sword's voice was hoarse and tremulous. " I will have search made at once in the district under my control. If the king is here, I will find him. And if he only was here and is gone I will find him, too, by heaven ! "

When the Colonel had gone back to his work Captain Sword called one of his men. " Get a horse forthwith. I must start at once on urgent business." He issued instructions to his subordinate officers, and within five minutes was in the saddle. He gave no one an inkling of his errand. What he had done alone must alone be undone. He understood now, and as he rode towards the Pampeluna Road in the direction of the French lines, he was the prey to anger and bitter shame. He had been fooled by a woman with child's eyes !

The start which the party had had might not avail them so very much, as the roads were in confusion, and there was always a chance that the carriage had been stopped and searched by the troops scattered about

the plateau. He pushed his horse forward at the best speed it could reach, heading always to the Pampeluna Road. The way was heavy with dust, but the sun burned less hotly as it descended. But now he discovered that this part was singularly empty, owing to the roll of the tide of battle which he could hear in the distance. He rode between the lines of vineyards, with here and there a tree along the hedges. Once or twice he pulled up undecidedly at a cross-road, but in each case continued his course on the main way, until turning a corner, at last, he beheld a carriage bowling quietly in front of him. The coachman seemed to whip up at once, but he had no difficulty in overtaking him.

"Halt!" he cried, and the man obeyed. A face looked out of the window—a face with the blue eyes and crowned with the aureole of hair.

"Madame!" said he, coldly civil, "I regret I must withdraw my pass. You must return with me."

He cocked a pistol as he spoke. She gazed at him with a little whiteness of face.

"Ah, Monsieur!" she faltered. "You have given your word. You would not take it back! My brother sleeps."

He dismounted and opened the door. "Madame, I regret I have my orders," he said still coldly.

"Monsieur! Monsieur!" she faltered.

"When I gave you my promise," said he, "I was under a delusion; I was deceived. Mademoiselle, you know how deeply."

"I?" she answered, as if in astonishment. "But, Monsieur, I?"

For answer he pointed to the interior of the carriage.

"Who lies there?" he demanded, sternly.

"Why, my brother," she answered, quietly.

Captain Sword peered in. She descended into the road as though to give him room for his quest. Lying asleep against the cushions was the young man he had met in the house—the Comte de Dessourier. He glanced at the girl. The likeness between them was unmistakable, and unmistakably the features were not those of King Joseph. Had he leapt to a wrong conclusion? For a moment he stood wondering, and then the young man opened his eyes with a start.

"You are too late, Monsieur," he said faintly. "But any satisfaction I can give you when this"—he pointed to his arm—"is better I will gladly give."

One of the horses was gone from the carriage. Captain Sword gave vent to a short unpleasing laugh. He understood very well now.

"I see, Monsieur," he said. "I congratulate Mademoiselle on her talent for interference in political matters and on her acting."

She stood a little way off, her eyes downcast.

"My brother is wounded. My mother is dying. It is true!" she murmured.

He shrugged his shoulders. "I understand," he said. "I understand everything, save, of course, where His Majesty now is."

She looked up quickly. "Ah, Monsieur, I wish you had not understood," she cried, "save only, what is true, that you helped a brother and a sister."

"I'm afraid that cannot be managed now," said Sword dryly. "I have let the King escape."

"We are your prisoners," she said humbly.

"I took you only for a tender-hearted woman," he said in his ironic voice.

"I am also a French woman, Monsieur," she said, quickly raising her head.

"I wish you a good journey, Mademoiselle," he said, raising his hat.

"What!" she said in astonishment, "you leave us to——"

"You reminded me, Mademoiselle, that I war not on women and wounded men."

She was silent, and then, "Oh, you are noble—you are noble!" she cried.

A grim smile passed over his face. He bowed, and mounting, turned his horse's head. Behind him Maline stood, reluctant, unwilling to enter the carriage as she watched him canter off.

When he arrived at the inn again, Captain Sword found a letter awaiting him.

"If your description of the Count and Countess de Dessourier is correct, and you certify to the wound, you may pass them out."

He folded the paper again, and smiled sardonically.

"Well, I have done so," he said to himself.

In the village the search for the King was still proceeding.

"Good Hunting, Old Chap"

A little touch of imagination and its result

By "SAPPER"

THE Well-known Soldier leaned back in his chair, and thoughtfully held his glass up to the light.

"Personally," he remarked at length, "I would sooner be sent to prison for five years for a thing I had done than be let out after two-and-a-half for a thing I hadn't."

"An interesting point," conceded the Celebrated Actor. "But to the casual observer, unversed in psychology, it might appear to be merely a choice between five years of hell and two and a half."

The Celebrated Actor, it may be stated, had recently been dipping into various "ologies" in the course of studying his newest and greatest part. Luckily for the sake of the public, the leaves of most of the treatises were still uncut, which ensured that his rendering of the strong, silent Napoleon of finance would not differ appreciably from his own celebrated personality. Incidentally he had never intended that it should, but the author of the play was a serious young man, and the Actor was nothing if not tactful.

"I am inclined to disagree, General," said the Eminent Divine. "Surely the moral support of a clear conscience——"

"Quite," murmured the Actor. "Quite."

"Would cut no ice, Bishop," declared the Soldier. "Two and a half years is too long a time for such a comparatively frail support as a clear conscience. Especially a youngster's."

"Exactly," agreed the Actor. "Exactly. Two-and-a-half years of hell for something one had not done. . . . Appalling—quite appalling." With great care he continued the delicate process of peeling a walnut.

But the Bishop was not convinced. "All the time he would know that a mistake had been made; that sooner or later he would be cleared in the eyes of the world. Whereas if he was guilty he would know that no such chance existed, and that when he came out from prison he would be an outcast—a jail-bird."

The Soldier shook his head and drained his glass. "Right in theory, Bishop; right in practice, too, if the clearing had been quicker. But two and a half years is too long. Hope would die: a youngster would grow bitter."

"Where is he now?" demanded the Celebrated Actor, sweeping back his hair with the gesture for which he was rightly famous.

"No one knows," said the Soldier, quietly.

"He came out a week ago. His brother met him at the prison gates, but Hugh gave him the slip. And since then he's hidden himself. Of course, he could be traced, but his father is wise, I think, in not doing so."

The Bishop nodded. "He will find himself in time; and it's best to leave him alone till he does. A good boy, too."

For a while the three men were silent while the soft summer breeze played gently through the old-fashioned garden outside and the wonderful scent of the laburnum came fragrant through the open windows.

"I forget exactly what happened," remarked the Actor, at length. "I was producing 'King Lear' at the time, I remember, and—" He glanced inquiringly at the General.

"A fairly common story," returned the Soldier, lighting a cigarette thoughtfully. "The boy had been an ass and owed a lot of money to some bookmaker. Then he plunged on the Derby—the year Signorinetta won at a hundred to one—and went down, like most of us did. Two days afterwards a couple of thousand in cash was missing. Also the books were falsified over a long period. Everything pointed to him, and they found him guilty, though he protested his innocence all through. A month ago the real thief confessed—two and a half years too late."

The General shrugged his shoulders, and then suddenly sat motionless, staring with narrowed eyes into the darkness outside.

"Quaint how one's eyes deceive one at night." He sat back again in his chair. "For a moment I thought I saw someone moving by the edge of the lawn."

"And your niece?" pursued the Actor. "Weren't they engaged or something?"

"Yes. It almost broke Beryl's heart. You know, of course, the dog was his?"

"I did not," said the Actor. "Ah! that accounts, of course, for her terrible grief."

"If I had my way," snarled the General, fiercely, "I'd flog that young swine Parker to within an inch of his worthless life. And then I'd put a trap on his own leg."

The Actor nodded. "I agree, General. Personally, I am no great dog-lover. They have a way of concealing themselves about the furniture which is most disconcerting should one inadvertently sit upon them. But a trap——"

He shuddered, and poured himself out some more port.

"If only we could get hold of the boy," mused the General, returning to his original theme. "I can guess what he's feeling, and the longer he goes on without the human touch, the harder and more bitter he'll become. He wants to be made to shake hands with reality again; to hit something, if you like—but to get it over. He's bottling it up—I know it; and it's a bad thing for a youngster to bottle up bitterness."

The Soldier rose and strolled over to the window. For a while he leaned against the open frame, smoking quietly, and hardly conscious of the argument which had started in the room behind him. The power of the stage as a pulpit was an evergreen with the Celebrated Actor, and he felt in no mood for a discussion on the matter. The youngster, Hugh Dawnay, was filling his mind, and also Tommy, that morning.

He'd helped the vet. put the little terrier under, with a dose of prussic acid, and after it was over the two men had stared at one another, and then looked away, as is the manner of men who are feeling deeply.

"I hate it, more and more each time," said the vet. gruffly. "Poor little chap!"

"It's worse than a man," snapped the General. "A dog trusts a fellow so—so infernally. Damn that young Parker!"

With which explosion he had blown his nose loudly and stalked off for a long walk.

At length he pitched his cigarette away and turned back into the room. And at that moment, very clear and distinct from somewhere in the garden, there came a low whistle.

"Hush! you fellows, listen!" The argument ceased at his abrupt words, and the two men stared at him, as he stood motionless half-way between the table and the window. "Did you hear that whistle?"

"Personally, I did not," remarked the Actor. "But at the moment I was engrossed in other matters. A vulgar habit—whistling—but not, I regret to say, uncommon."

"There's someone in the garden," said the General. "I thought I saw something move earlier, and just then I heard a whistle most distinctly."

"My dear man," said the Actor, with a beneficent wave of his shapely hand, "are there not maidservants in the house? I fear that soldiering destroys romance."

The Soldier grunted. "Perhaps you're right. My mind was busy with other things. I think I'll take a stroll outside, too, for a bit. Give me a hail when you've finished your discussion."

He moved once more toward the window, only to pause on the threshold.

"Why, Hugh, my dear lad," he said, quietly, "it's good to see you again. Come in."

And the Celebrated Actor and the Eminent Divine, looking up quickly at his words, saw a man standing outside on the path, whose face was the face of one into whose soul iron had entered.

For a moment or two Hugh Dawnay hesitated. Then, with the faintest perceptible shrug of his shoulders, he stepped into the room. He glanced at each man in turn; then his eyes came back to the Soldier's face and rested there.

"Good evening, General." His voice was quite expressionless. "I must apologise for intruding like this."

"Apologise!" The Soldier smiled at him. "What the devil is there to apologise about? I'm just amazingly glad to see you. Do you know the Bishop of Sussex and Mr. Trayne?"

"I had the pleasure of seeing you act, Mr. Trayne, just before I was so kindly accommodated at His Majesty's expense." Hugh's voice was as expressionless as ever. "I suppose you are still charming London with your art?"

For the first time in his life the Celebrated Actor felt at a loss. Had some charming woman made that remark to him—and many

had—he would have known his cue. A deprecating wave of his hands—a half-hearted denial—a delicately turned compliment; it was all too easy. But as he stared at the boy on the other side of the table—the boy with the tired face of a man—the cloak of mannerisms which he had worn successfully for twenty years slipped off, and the soul of the great artist—and he was that, for all his artificiality—showed in his eyes. More clearly, perhaps, than either of the two, he realised the dreadful laughter which was shaking the boy's soul; realised the bitter cynicism behind the ordinary words. More clearly than they could he saw himself, he saw the room, he saw life through the eyes of Hugh Dawnay.

"I still strut my small part," he said, gravely. "I still win a little brief applause. And if I can help those who see me to forget the bitterness and sorrow of the day, even though it be only for a while, it is enough." He rose, and laid both his hands on the boy's shoulders. "Forgive an old mummer's presumption, my lad. Don't think me an impertinent fool prating of what I do not know and cannot understand. You have been in the depths. God knows how deep and bitter they have been—God and you—unjustly, unfairly—I know that. And to you at the moment we seem typical of the smug respectability which pushed you there. Vain words of regret—empty phrases of sorrow, cannot give you back your two-and-a-half wasted years any more than my playing alters the realities of the past. But maybe the hour or two of forgetfulness helps a man to face the realities of the future. Will you not try to forget, too?"

"And what play will you stage for me, Mr. Trayne," answered Hugh, quietly, "which will help me to forget? Will you cast me for the principal part, or am I to be one of the audience?" The boy threw back his head and laughed silently. "Two-and-a-half years of the same soul-killing monotony. Why, I became an expert at talking to the man next to me, who was a 'lifer.' They couldn't prove he'd actually intended to murder the girl, and his counsel successfully pleaded drink. A charming fellow." Once again he laughed; then, with a quick movement, he thrust his hands in his pockets and, stepping back towards the window, faced the three men for a while in silence.

"For a moment or two you must listen to me," he said, and there was a harsh commanding ring in his voice. "Each of you is old enough to be my father in years; I am older than all of you combined in reality. At least, that is how I feel just now. You, Mr. Trayne, have talked about forgetfulness; in time, perhaps, I shall forget. But there's something inside me at the present moment which is numbing me. I can't feel, I can't think, I can't hate—I'm simply apathetic. I don't want to have anything to do with men; I want to get right away from them. And I'm going—I'm going; but I'm not going alone." He swung round and faced the Soldier. "Do you know why I've come here to-night, General?"

The Soldier looked at him quietly. "To see Beryl? Because she'd like to see you, Hugh."

But Hugh Dawnay shook his head. "No, not to see Beryl. I'm not fit to see her—yet. Perhaps in a year or two—if she isn't married by then. No, it's not to see any human being; not even her. It's to get Tommy; and take him with me out into the big spaces where, perhaps, in time one may see things differently."

Unconscious of the effect of his words on his listeners, he had turned and was staring into the soft summer night.

"All the time that I've been in prison"—and his voice had lost its harshness—"I've thought of that little chap. I've sat on my stool in the cell, and I've felt his cold, wet muzzle thrust into my hand: I've seen his eyes—those great brown eyes—staring up at me, asking for a hunt. But there's no hunting in prison—no rabbits: and I used to promise him that when I came out we'd go off together, just he and I—on to the moors somewhere—and be alone. He wouldn't mind even if I'd done it—even if I had stolen the money. That's the wonder of a dog: where he's so infinitely better than a man." The boy gave a little sigh, and for the first time a genuine smile flickered round his lips. "I've been all round the house, whistling and looking for him—but I expect he's in the drawing-room somewhere. With Beryl, perhaps. I wonder, General, if you'd get him for me?"

He glanced at the Soldier, and slowly his eyes dilated, as he saw the look on the older man's face. He glanced at the Bishop, who was staring at the cloth; he glanced at the Actor, who was staring at the Bishop, and suddenly he gave a little choking cry.

"My God!" he muttered, brokenly, "don't tell me that! Don't say that Tommy is—dead!"

It was the Soldier who answered, and his voice was suspiciously gruff.

"The little fellow was mauled in a trap this morning, old chap: and we had—to put him out of the way."

"Mauled in a trap?" The boy's voice was dead. "Tommy mauled in a trap? Who laid the trap?"

And it was the Actor who sat up, with a sudden light in his eyes, and supplied the information.

"Young Parker, who is farming the bit of ground next to here," he said, with almost unnecessary distinctness. "You can see his house through the trees."

"Young Parker? I remember young Parker." Covertly the Celebrated Actor watched the boy's face, and what he saw there seemed to afford him satisfaction.

"Where is the little dog buried?" asked the boy quietly.

"Underneath the old yew tree," said the General. "Beryl put a ring of stones around his grave this afternoon."

"I see," said the boy. "Thank you. I'm sorry to have troubled you."

The next instant he was gone, and it was the Actor who stopped the Soldier as he was on the point of going after him.

"The boy has got his part," he remarked, cryptically. "At present he requires no prompting."

"What the deuce are you talking about?" demanded the General, irritably.

But the Celebrated Actor was himself once more.

"Leave it to me, my dear fellow," he murmured, magnificently, throwing back his head in another of those famous gestures which were the pride and delight of countless multitudes. "Leave it entirely to me. The stage is set: very soon the curtain will ring up." He stalked to the window, and stood for a moment on the path outside, while the other two looked at one another and shrugged their shoulders.

"Can't feel, can't think, can't hate. That boy feels and thinks and hates—hates, I tell you, at this moment."

With which Parthian shot the Celebrated Actor vanished into the night.

"What on earth is the fellow driving at?" said the Soldier, peevishly.

But the answer to that question was apparently beyond the scope of the Eminent Divine, and in silence the two men listened to the scrunch of the Actor's footsteps on the gravel, growing fainter and fainter in the distance.

II

HALF-AN-HOUR later they were still sitting at the table. The Actor had not returned: there had been no further sign of Hugh, and the inaction was getting on the Soldier's nerves. Twice had he risen and gone to the window; twice had he taken a few steps into the darkness outside, only to return and hover undecidedly by the fireplace.

"I feel I ought to go and look for the boy," he remarked for the twentieth time. "Trayne's such an ass."

And for the twentieth time the Bishop counselled patience.

"In some ways he is," he agreed: "in others he's very shrewd. He's got more imagination, General, than both of us put together, and real imagination is akin to genius. Leave him alone: he can't do any harm."

With a non-committal grunt, the Soldier sat down, only to rise again immediately as a tall, slight girl in white came in through the open window. There was a misty look in her eyes, and her lips were faintly tremulous, but she came straight up to the General and put a hand on his arm. The other hand, with a piece of paper clutched in it, she held behind her back.

"Hugh has come back, Uncle Jim," she said. "Did you know?"

"Yes, old lady, I knew. Have you seen him?"

"No, I haven't seen him. Did he—did he come for Tommy?"

The General nodded. "Yes. And I told him what had happened."

For a moment the girl's lips quivered. "Poor old Hugh!"

Very gently the Soldier stroked the girl's hair.

"We must give him time, Beryl. He's—he's not quite himself yet. By the way," he added, struck by a sudden thought, "if you haven't seen him, how do you know he's come back?"

The girl's eyes filled with tears. "I went out to Tommy's grave again—I wanted to see that the little fellow was comfortable, and—and—I found this."

She held out the scrap of paper to the Soldier, and then broke down uncontrollably. And the man, having glanced at it, coughed with unnecessary violence and handed it to the Eminent Divine.

"It was just like him—just like Hugh," sobbed the girl. "And Tommy—why, what more would Tommy want?" She picked up the paper and stared at it through her tears. "'Good hunting, old chap.—H.D.' Good hunting. He's got a soul—I know he has. He's having the most glorious chase after bunnies now—somewhere—somewhere else Isn't he?"

She turned appealingly to the Bishop, but that eminent Pillar of the Church was engrossed in the study of a very ordinary print, and from the assiduous manner he was polishing his glasses he seemed to be having difficulties with his eyesight.

And it was thus a moment or two later that the Celebrated Actor found them.

"Successful." He barked the word grandiloquently from the window. "Utterly and completely successful. The curtain is shortly going up: it would be well if the audience took their seats as silently as possible."

"What do you mean, Mr. Trayne?" The girl was staring at him in amazement through her tears.

"A very human play, my dear young lady, is on the point of being acted. As producer, general manager, box office combined, I beg to state that there will be only one performance. The financial receipts will be *nil:* the moral receipts will be a soul regained. And who shall say that it is not a more tangible asset?" For a while he stared magnificently at nothing, with one hand thrust carelessly out—that attitude which had long caused infatuated denizens of the pit to stand for hours in dreadful draughts lest they should fail to secure the front row. Then he returned with an effort to things mundane. "Follow me," he ordered, "and do not talk or make a noise."

"Where's the boy, Trayne?" demanded the General, almost angrily. In his own vernacular, he was feeling rattled.

"You shall see in good time. Come."

It was a strange procession which might have been seen wending its way through the darkness a little later. First came the Celebrated Actor—supremely happy, as befits the great showman who has the goods to offer. Then, a few steps behind him, was the Well-known Soldier, periodically muttering under his breath, and with the girl's hand on his arm. Behind them again trotted the Eminent Divine, unable to see very well in the dark, and continually stubbing his toes on various obstructions in the ground.

"Where is he taking us to?" whispered the girl to her uncle.

"Heaven knows, my dear!" he answered. irritably. "The man's an ass, as I've said before."

"But what did he mean about the very human play?" she persisted. "And the soul regained?"

Before the Soldier could answer, the guide turned, and holding up his hand demanded silence.

"We approach the stage," he declaimed. "Silence is essential."

He led the way between some trees, and finally halted behind a clump of low bushes.

"Personally," he whispered, "I am a man of peace, but it struck me from my rudimentary knowledge of pugilism that the clearing in front was ideally suited to that brutal form of amusement. And when I suggested it to Hugh, he quite agreed."

"You suggested it to Hugh!" said the Soldier slowly, and gradually a look of comprehension began to dawn in his eyes. "Why, Actor-man, Actor-man, I retract every thought I've had about you to-night."

He peered cautiously through the bushes, and a slow smile spread over his face.

"Tell me, Actor-man," he whispered, "how did you get the other?"

"I howled such insults as I could think of in my poor way through the window."

Then he, too, cautiously peered over the top of the bush. "What think you of my show, Soldier-man?"

"It is altogether beautiful and lovely to regard," replied the other. "Can the Church see?"

And, behold, the Church was lying on its stomach to get a better view.

The moonlight shone down, clear and bright on the little glade in front. At the back of it, in the trees, stood young Parker's house, but young Parker himself, with an ugly sneer on his face, was engaged in removing his coat. Facing him stood Hugh Dawnay, and in the cold white light his eyes shone hard and merciless.

"So you want me to thrash you as well as stop your damned dog poaching," laughed young Parker. "All right, you bally jail-bird, come on!"

He rushed in as he spoke and his fist shot out as he closed. The fight had started, and from that moment no one of the fascinated audience spoke or moved. Parker was the heavier of the two, but the boy was the better boxer. In fact, in the strict sense of the word, the young farmer was not a boxer at all—but he was fit and he was strong. And had it not been for the two-and-a-half years' hard manual labour which the other had gone through, the issue in all probability would have been different.

As it was they fought all out for five minutes, and then young Parker grew wild. He became flurried—tried rushing—his fists whirling like flails. And the more flurried he grew the more cool and collected became the boy. And then came the end. A right-arm jolt below his heart brought the farmer's head forward, a left uppercut under the jaw laid him out. For a while the spectators watched him moaning on the ground, while the Church wriggled ecstatically under its sheltering bush.

"Had enough, you swine?" asked the boy, quietly.

The prostrate figure mumbled something.

"Get up and swear to me that you will never again lay a trap in that part of your land. Get a move on!" he snarled.

"All right." The farmer shambled to his feet, watching him sullenly. "I swear."

"Now go down on your knees and apologise for calling me a jailbird. Hurry up, you filthy scum! On your knees I said."

And as young Parker went on his knees, according to order, the girl, her eyes shining like stars, clapped her hands softly together.

"Quick!" said the Celebrated Actor, authoritatively. "Back to the house, you people. The play is over and my estimate of the receipts is, I think, correct."

Stealthily as it had come, the procession moved back to the house. At intervals, the Eminent Divine was observed to jolt with his right, following it up with a slashing left uppercut into space, what time he chuckled consumedly. And even a slight error as to distance, which caused him far more pain than the tree which he unfortunately smote, failed to damp his spirits. The Soldier walked with a spring in his step, the Actor hummed gently under his breath, and it was only as they reached the open window of the dining-room that they realized that the girl had slipped away in the darkness and was not with them.

"Where is Beryl?" said the General, pausing on the path.

"Heaven help the man!" fumed the Actor, addressing space. "His past career, we understand, is comparatively distinguished from a military point of view. But"—and he turned accusingly to the Soldier—"you must have driven every woman you ever met completely off her chump."

"Chump," chuckled the Bishop, feinting with his right and gently upper-cutting the Celebrated Actor's celebrated chin. "What is chump, you old sinner?"

But the Well-known Soldier only smiled—a trifle sadly. "She's all I've got, old chap, and her happiness is mine."

"She is happy now," remarked the Actor, quietly. "The boy's all right."

For a while the three men were silent, each busy with his own thoughts. And then over the General's face a grin began to spread.

"Tell me, you charmer of foolish women," he demanded, "how did you manage it?"

"Your vulgar gibe leaves me unmoved," returned the Actor, calmly. "To-night is merely a proof of how brains and imagination control every situation. I hope you both appreciate my inference."

"Go on," chuckled the General. "The Church and the Army hide their diminished heads."

What better destroyer of apathy is there than scrapping with someone, whom in less civilised and more primitive days one would have killed? I followed him. I suggested it to him—I even went so far as to assist him in his search for a suitable spot on which to do it. And then"—he paused magnificently—"I drew the badger. I bolted the fox. I extracted young Parker."

"How?" murmured the Church.

"I hit him first on the head with an over-ripe pear, which I threw through the window. A wonderful shot—not once in a hundred times would I do it again. And as he jumped up from the table where he was sitting, I spoke to him from my heart."

"Yes," grinned the Soldier. "And what did you say?"

"I said, 'You dirty louse—you maimer of little dogs—come out and fight, unless you're a coward as well as a swine!' Then," murmured the Actor, "I ran as fast as I could, for fear he might mistake his opponent and start on me."

For a space there was silence, while the Army and the Church shook hopelessly, and the Stage impressively lit a cigar. And it was as he deposited the match in an ash-tray on the table that he saw the piece of paper lying in front of him. He read what was written on it, and then he turned slowly and looked at the other two.

"So that's what he was doing under the yew tree," he said softly. "Dear lad! Why, yes, he's a dear lad."

"Of course he is," returned the Soldier, softly. "What the devil did you think?"

It was under the yew tree that the boy and girl met. She was kneeling there, her frock gleaming white in the moonlight as Hugh came through the trees, and for a time he watched her without speaking. Two-and-a-half years—more—since he had seen her, as she bent forward and laid both her hands on the little grave, and, suddenly, with a great wave of wonder, he realized that all the bitterness had gone from his soul. The past was blotted out—sponged from the slate; and the present—why, the present held out beckoning hands of welcome.

"Beryl," he whispered very low, but not so low that she failed to hear him.

"Why, Hugh, dear," she answered, "I was afraid you'd go away without seeing me."

"I should, if—Tommy had been alive."

He knelt beside her, and together they rearranged two or three of the stones.

"I put a bit of paper there," he said, after a moment.

"I found it," she answered. "That's how I knew you were here—first. Oh! Hugh"—almost unconsciously she found herself in his arms—"poor little chap! And I'd been telling him all last week he'd be seeing you soon."

"You darling!" The boy's voice was husky. "He knows—Tommy knows."

And so for a while they clung together, while the scent of the summer flowers mingled with the scent of her hair.

"If he'd been here, Beryl, I was going to take him," he said, at last. "I was bitter—dear heavens! but I was bitter. I felt I didn't even want to see you. We were going hunting together—just he and I—out in the wilds."

"And now, boy," whispered the girl, "are you bitter any more?"

"No," he answered, wonderingly. "I'm not. Because, Beryl, because I've thrashed that swine who killed him. Something seemed to snap in me as he went down and out, and I was conscious of a sort of marvellous happiness."

"I know," she said, laughing a little and crying a little, as a girl will do. "I know, dear boy. I saw you do it."

"You saw me thrash him!" he said, amazed. "But how? I don't understand."

"We all did!" she cried: "Uncle Jim and the Bishop and Mr. Trayne and me. Mr. Trayne came back and told us to come"

"I see," said the boy, slowly. "I see. I think I'll go and thank Mr. Trayne."

But there are other things in this world more important even than a debt of gratitude to the most celebrated of actors, and half-an-hour later the boy and girl were still pacing slowly up and down the lawn. There were so many glorious plans to be made for the future—the future of which the blackness had vanished so completely. And it was with almost a feeling of reproach that the girl suddenly turned to him.

"Why, boy," she cried, "we've forgotten Tommy!"

"Tommy!" he said. "Why, so we have." He stared at her for a while, and there was a little quizzical smile on his lips. "It's funny, isn't it?" he went on slowly, "that the greatest thing the little chap has ever done for me he has done by his death." He took her in his arms and held her very close. "If he'd lived, it might have all come right—in time; but now——"

And Hugh Dawnay finished his sentence in the only way such sentences can be finished.

"Come in, you two youngsters."

The General's voice came cheerfully from the dining-room, and arm-in-arm they walked towards the open window.

Half-way there they paused, and instinctively their eyes turned towards the old yew tree.

"Why, there he is, boy," breathed the girl. "Don't you see him, and the black mark on his neck, and tail wagging?"

"It's the shadows, darling," answered the boy. "The moonlight through the trees."

Maybe, maybe. Who knows?

Gently he led her on, and she passed into the room ahead of him. And from the path outside there rose again into the soft summer night the farewell message of a friend to a friend:

"Good hunting, old chap."

The Kingdom of Abdullah

A prophecy and how it was fulfilled

By STEPHEN BOND

"ABDULLAH."

"Leetle lady."

"Why do the Arab boys point their thumbs at you, whenever we cross the Grand Soko?"

The Arab boy made no immediate reply, save to draw the bridle of his little companion's mule nearer to his own in the narrow Tangier street, whilst he coiled the silken drapery flying in streamers from his right arm almost reverently around his little charge's golden hair and white linen sailor frock, for fear the bulging charcoal basket of a Nubian carrier, then passing them, might perhaps touch her as he brushed against them in the throng.

Little Mabel Trent's white sailor frock was always a source of the greatest anxiety to Abdullah whenever he had occasion to lead her mule through the town or market place.

There were begging Arabs to be avoided, likewise greasy Soudanese, impertinent Moors, who always took the centre of the narrow path, to say nothing of begging Nubians, and lepers.

Abdullah shuddered at the very thought of the latter, whilst jealousy of his beautiful little charge, combined with excessive zeal, caused him to use his stick freely in order to procure as much isolation as possible amid so motley a crowd.

At length a seemingly unending procession of camels, mules, goats, and sheep having been satisfactorily avoided, Abdullah found space to breathe again freely.

"Abdullah, you have not answered my question, and it is very, very rude indeed not to answer when a lady asks you about something she wishes to hear most particularly." And the imperious young lady drew herself up with all the hurt dignity of thirteen summers.

"Pardon, leetle lady, but I must guide you free from all the common ones, for my leetle lady is as a queen."

"Oh, Abdullah, what a funny idea!" and the child gave an amused little laugh.

"Yes," repeated Abdullah, "as a queen; and these common ones must not touch her, because her little robe is as white as —as——" and Abdullah hesitated painfully for a simile.

"As this dear mule Mustapha," declared the young lady, promptly burying her rosy face upon the unconscious animal's neck, and bestowing a kiss upon it.

Abdullah raised his great dark eyes heavenwards in scandalized amazement. "No, no, lady," he exclaimed; "that common thing also, although it belongeth to me; yes, quite a common beast.

"So the leetle lady wishes to learn why the other common ones point their thumbs at me; it is a story I will tell her."

"Oh! Abdullah, a story—how lovely! Do tell me, and let us go slowly, I want so much to hear it. I always told father and auntie you were the nicest and most interesting Arab boy in all Tangiers, and I am right," concluded the youthful maiden triumphantly.

"The leetle lady is graciously pleased to bestow her favour upon me," replied Abdullah, with courteous grace. "If she will also find pardon for all my mistake words of her most dreadful tongue in which I have learnt to talk, I will tell all I have to tell.

"Behold, the thumb which these common ones point at me is to show the evil eye which is upon me."

"Upon you, Abdullah?"

"Yes, upon me, lady, and upon all those of my house before me."

"But, Abdullah," objected the girl, "the evil eye means a curse, does it not, in this strange land?"

"Yes," answered Abdullah simply. "I am accursed."

"Oh, surely not, Abdullah," his companion answered with wide-eyed seriousness; "no one can have the power to do that, you know; you believe in God, do you not?"

A faint smile broke like a ripple for a second over Abdullah's remarkable face; then he raised his eyes for a moment towards the burning sun which beat down in flame-coloured unfathomableness from a sapphire blue sky.

"My God is not the same as your God," answered Abdullah simply.

Mabel Trent nodded her golden head; she understood. "What a pity," thought the English child, with the prejudice peculiar to her race; "he is such a dear boy, and he might as well not have a God at all, because I am very much afraid he is a heathen."

"It came to pass," continued Abdullah, "that the curse descended upon our house."

"How did that happen, Abdullah?"

"My father's fathers were Kings of the Sun."

"Kings of the Sun, Abdullah?"

"Even so, lady, and lords of the earth. They were Kings of the City of the Sun, far away, the City of Soleil.

"I am the last of their long race. I am therefore a prince," announced Abdullah briefly.

"Oh, Abdullah, are you really a prince?" exclaimed the little girl excitedly. "Why it is like a fairy tale."

"Yes, a prince," solemnly affirmed Abdullah; "no fairy tale, true tale. I am the last Prince of the Sun.

"My fathers left their inheritance, and they settled yonder."

"Do you know, Abdullah," said the girl, "when my father started to paint you in his big slave picture he is doing, he always said you looked like a young prince."

"The English lord is good," answered the boy; "he spoke truly, though I have not ever told him this, my story. Yet should not I look like a prince?" asked the boy proudly. "although he paint my form among slaves.

"It came to pass that my father's father settled here," continued Abdullah. "See, yonder was once the palace of the kings, my fathers."

The young Arab stretched out a sturdy, ivory-hued arm towards the wild open country stretching before them, to where an old Moorish building, half crumbling away, stood against the sky-line, a last link of departed greatness, looking as cold as the shallow river pool before its courtyard, as neglected as the great wild flowers which flourished around its crumbling porches.

"I thought that was a temple, Abdullah."

"No," answered Abdullah, "no temple; once my father's palace."

"Why did you ever leave it, Abdullah?"

"My father's father married a Christian," answered Abdullah; "she very beautiful; they say she had hair like my leetle lady's own hair—gold, all gold; but it was not meet that a King of the Sun should marry a Christian, so a curse came upon us. There came a time of war when the great brigand Al Rasch ruled all the country. With fire and sword he overcame our house, which had never been overcome until then, and the numbers of his people were greater than the numbers of our people, and we were driven out. My father's father was put to cruel death, and his wife also."

"Oh, Abdullah! the beautiful lady with the golden hair, was she put to death as well?"

"Yes, all, all," answered Abdullah, "save one, their only child, my father. He escaped into Tangier for protection; he live some long time; he some time after marry, and he leave me, his son, behind him."

"But, Abdullah, was not the wicked wretch Al Rasch ever punished?"

Abdullah shook his head. "Our land not the same as your land," he answered. "Al Rasch he wicked man, he leave many sons, the youngest he still alive. The common ones of the city all say he is wicked man, he would murder and steal if he could."

"But, Abdullah, there is no such thing now anywhere as slavery."

Abdullah looked curiously at the childish face beside him; then he replied briefly:

"Let us turn again homeward down the hill, leetle lady, for it is the time for our tea. You take your tea from the black grains which I cannot drink; I take mine from mint. I will turn your mule—so, lady, and as we journey I will finish my story."

"Very well, Abdullah, I am listening, for I wish to hear why the curse should affect you."

"Very well, lady, I will do as you say; and behold it is like this:

"Al Rasch, the one who lives now, has set the common ones against me; he it

was who told the common ones I am as one accursed, and that I have the evil eye upon me. He knows that I am a prince of the Sun, so he hates me, inasmuch that he is a common one himself; but he never tries to harm me, lady, for fear of this." And Abdullah fingered the richly chased hilt of a dagger which protruded from his silken sash.

"Why, Abdullah, I only thought you carried that for ornament," exclaimed the girl.

"I would use it if there should be need," answered the lineal descendant of the Kings of the Sun enigmatically.

"Is that all the story, Abdullah?"

"No," answered Abdullah slowly: "there is yet one other thing which is written, lady, and must come to pass. It is said that the last Prince of the Sun shall die dressed as a beggar, yet with gold in his hand; also that his memory will be blessed for evermore."

"Do you believe that, Abdullah?"

"Yes, lady."

"How could you die a beggar, and yet have gold in your hand?"

"I cannot say, leetle lady, but it will surely come to pass. But see, we have arrived at the courtyard of your dwelling, lady. I will help you dismount, for the wicked white Mustapha sometimes kicks."

The wicked white Mustapha had suddenly grown fidgety, and not without a reason, for two evil-looking Moors were lurking just within the stone porch, and they slunk out just as the two children approached. In a second Abdullah had sprung between the men.

The boy was screaming out fierce imprecations in Arabic, and as he thrust the men aside the long dagger, hitherto mercifully concealed from the child's view within his belt, flashed in his hand.

The whole incident happened so quickly that the girl had only time to give a startled cry before the two men were slinking off as fast as they could go, and the child was looking in amazement at Abdullah trampling the roses in the dusty road with his sandled feet, and shaking his dagger in the direction of the retreating men.

"What is the matter, Abdullah?" asked the child. "What did those men want?"

"No good," cried Abdullah. "One is Al Rasch. Leetle lady," added the boy earnestly, "promise me, Abdullah, this one thing—never to go out alone here."

"I never do go out alone, unless father or you are with me, and as you know, Abdullah, father is away now, so Auntie lets me go out with you. Were you protecting me just now, Abdullah?"

Abdullah made no reply; he only shook his head doubtfully.

"Come again to-morrow for me, at four o'clock, dear Abdullah; it is very kind of you to look after me so well."

Without another word Abdullah suddenly knelt in the dust of the roadway and bent over the childish hand held out to him.

"Little lady," said the Arab boy earnestly, "I would die for you, or for your father, who is so good to me."

"Good-bye, my Prince Abdullah," said the child gaily, as she ran into the house.

But Abdullah would not have been quite so easy in his mind, as he sat upon the doorstep of his home that afternoon and drank his mint tea, if he had heard what the two men had been speaking of as they had departed over the hill towards the old palace.

"Is that the English child?" one had said.

"Yes," Al Rasch had answered; "her father is away; when he returns and finds her gone he will offer a big price as ransom, for behold, the English lord is very rich."

"What hour have you fixed?"

"To-morrow afternoon."

"Take care that little spitfire devil is not there."

"Leave it all to me," answered Al Rasch significantly.

All the donkey boys who passed Abdullah's doorstep that afternoon pointed their thumbs at him whilst he sipped his mint tea, but Abdullah did not care. Had not his little English lady called him a Prince?

II

PUNCTUALLY at four o'clock upon the following afternoon Abdullah, arrayed in coloured garments of many hues, entered the courtyard of Mr. Trent's house outside Tangier. He tethered his two mules to the ring of the stone seat, and wondered why the "leetle lady" did not run out to meet him as usual.

Wishing to ascertain the reason Abdullah boldly advanced to the verandah where the leetle lady's aunt, Miss Trent, sat doing her crochet work.

" I am afraid, Abdullah, you do not tell the truth," announced that lady severely, as Abdullah made a profound obeisance before her.

" Lady, surely that is not so," answered Abdullah, in a tone which showed how deeply he was hurt at such an imputation.

" You sent a message half an hour ago or more to say you were too ill to go out to-day."

" My lady, I sent no message," replied the bewildered Abdullah.

" Abdullah, do not tell me any more falsehoods ; why, the two men you sent in your place with mules have taken my niece Mabel for her ride."

" Two men ! " gasped Abdullah, and his ivory-coloured skin seemed to grow almost white with some sudden fear.

" Lady, lady," he implored, " you did not let her go ; oh, lady, say you did not let the golden-haired one be taken away."

Miss Trent's fears were suddenly aroused in spite of herself as she saw the agony of fear in the boy's face.

" What is the matter, Abdullah ? Why do you look and speak like that ? "

" Where is my lord her father ? " demanded Abdullah.

" He will not be back for two hours."

Then Abdullah appeared to lose all sense of control, and broke into loud imprecations in Arabic.

" Here is the beggar boy who first brought the message," said Miss Trent ; " I told him to go and get fed in the kitchen. Why, look," the lady broke off, " he is running away."

Swift as a swallow flies, Abdullah cleared the space from the verandah across the courtyard, and pounced upon the running beggar boy.

What followed Miss Trent could never understand. She only saw Abdullah pinioning the beggar boy to the ground, whilst he appeared to be choking answers in Arabic from him, one by one, before proceeding to drag him towards the house. Abdullah held the beggar boy whilst he made him strip every article of his clothing, except his loin cloth, whereupon Abdullah proceeded to do like wise ; then Abdullah attired himself quickly in the beggar's rags.

" Scandalous," commented Miss Trent ; " but I suppose it is their way of making friends again."

Then Abdullah faced the astonished lady.

" I go to take my lord's Arab horse from the stall," declared the boy, " for an Arab horse can travel faster than mules. Send you for help—they have stolen the leetle one ; arouse the town, send after me, I —Abdullah, implore you.

" Before Heaven, lady, they have stolen her for ransom. I go after her in this miserable one's rags that they may think that I am he, should they see me overtaking them," were his last words.

He rode that afternoon barebacked, as his fathers had ridden ; between his white teeth he bit his father's dagger, the wild blood of his fathers was up and racing through his veins.

The Arab beggar boy had been choked into telling the first half of the story. Would he be in time to catch them up, Abdullah wondered, before they changed mules at the old palace? On, on, he rode as one possessed, he did not spare the horse ; Abdullah would spare nothing that afternoon. The horse was giving in ; it streamed beneath the burning afternoon sun, it trembled, it stumbled ; on again, another mile, then another, and another ; at last it sank exhausted. No matter, Abdullah sped onward upon foot ; nearer, nearer, to his destination ; there was the old palace, at last in sight. Three mules stood in front of the door.

Flat down upon his hands and knees dropped Abdullah ; his knife was still fixed between his teeth as he wriggled snake-like through the reeds and wild flowers, until at last he reached the mules. He saw at a glance that the two men must be inside the old building. Among the mules he crept, whilst every sharp whinny the animals gave told the tale of how he was laming them with the long keen dagger, one after another.

There was only one mule to be spared, for upon it was tied a little, bound, sobbing bundle.

Again the knife was at work, the thongs that bound her were cut, the gag was taken out of her mouth. Abdullah's hand had instantly stifled the cry of joy she gave.

" Ride straight down the hill," whispered Abdullah ; " turn back for nothing." He thrust a whip into her hand. " They cannot follow. Promise me, do not once look back ; gallop, gallop, lady."

" Abdullah, I'm afraid to go alone."

" I wait behind, to aid you, lady. Go."

Only the gallop of a mule clattering

down the hill, then two fierce forms, bursting out of the old Moorish palace. Then a wild scuffle of drapery, and the flash of knives, shrill Arabic yells, amidst which one small brave form appeared fighting like a wild cat matched against two tigers. At the end a piercing cry, then as the smaller form falls and remains suddenly still, the other forms rush towards the mules. The mule bearing the little English girl is already out of sight.

Three hours later Mr. Trent and his little daughter Mabel are bending over a small form which has crawled to the edge of the river brook before the old palace, to see if water could staunch the blood which flows from a mortal wound.

The little girl has flung her arms around Abdullah's neck.

"Abdullah, dear Abdullah, open your eyes, speak to me," sobs the child.

Her golden hair falls in a shower of curls beside his dark head. His hands tremble and twitch as he reverently takes a tress of it in his failing grasp, then he whispers, "Leetle lady, so it is all true."

"What, dear Abdullah?"

His eyes look from the golden sun which is beginning to set to the golden hair he is holding fast in his hand. "I am going to my kingdom."

"No, no, Abdullah, stay with me," she implores.

"All true, leetle lady; the last Prince of the Sun shall die dressed in rags. All true, lady; it says dressed in rags, but with gold in his hand." For a moment his dimmed eyes turned significantly to the child's golden tress; which he is gently clasping.

"No—no, Abdullah, do not say that."

"And his memory shall be blessed for evermore," said Abdullah slowly; then, whilst he smiled, his head sank back.

"Aye, blessed for evermore, little Prince," repeated Mr. Trent solemnly, as he closed the eyes of the last of the Princes of the Sun.

Over the great fireplace of a sunny English studio, which belongs to one of our celebrated Academicians, hangs a remarkable picture. It is a beautiful life-sized head and shoulders of an Arab boy. Underneath the picture is printed in gold letters:—

"ABDULLAH, LAST PRINCE OF THE SUN, WHO GAVE HIS LIFE FOR ANOTHER BEFORE HE ENTERED INTO HIS KINGDOM."

In Praise of Tobacco

NOW to descend from the substance of the smoke to the ashes, 'tis well known the medicinal virtues thereof are very many; but they are so common that I will spare the inserting of them here. But if one would try a petty conclusion how much smoke there is in a pound of tobacco, the ashes will tell him; for let a pound of tobacco be exactly weighed, and the ashes kept charily and weighed afterwards, what wants of a pound weight in the ashes cannot be denied to have been smoke which evaporated into air. I have been told that Sir Walter Raleigh won a wager of Queen Elizabeth upon this nicety. The Spaniards and Irish take it most in powder or smutchin, and it mightily refreshes the brain, and I believe there's as much taken this way in Ireland as there is in pipes in England; one shall commonly see the serving-maid upon the washing-block and the swain upon the plough-share, when they are tired with labour, take out their boxes of smutchin and draw it into their nostrils with a quill, and it will beget new spirits in them with a fresh vigour to fall to their work again.

In Barbary and other parts of Afric 'tis wonderful what a small pill of tobacco will do; for those who use to ride post through the sandy deserts, where they meet not with anything that's potable or edible, sometimes three days together, they used to carry small balls or pills of tobacco which, being put under the tongue, it affords them a perpetual moisture and takes off the edge of the appetite for some days.

JAMES HOWELL.

The Queen of Spades

"One hopeless dark idolater of chance"

By ALEXANDER PUSHKIN

(*Specially translated for* THE ARGOSY *by Heron Lepper*)

Alexander Pushkin, poet and pioneer in the art of modern story-telling is here represented by what is usually considered to be his masterpiece—a story which gives full scope to his powers of irony and acute observation, and which contains a dramatic situation of an intensity scarcely equalled by any writer of fiction.

THE party of young officers had been playing cards in the rooms of Naroumof, a lieutenant in the Horse Guards. A long winter's night had slipped away imperceptibly, and it was five o'clock in the morning when supper was served, to which the winners sat down with a hearty appetite; as for the others, they were just content to look at their empty plates at first. By degrees, however, aided by the champagne, talk became general and more animated.

"And what sort of luck had *you*, Sourine?" the host demanded of one of the party.

"Oh, I lost as usual. I have simply no luck. I gamble as regularly as if it were my profession, keep perfectly cool, never change my game, never get ruffled; and yet I am always a loser!"

"What do you think of Hermann?" said another, pointing to a young Engineer officer. "Never in his life has he laid a bet or staked on the chance of a card, and yet he sits up all night watching us gambling."

"I do so because the game interests me," said Hermann; "but I have no inclination to risk the necessary in order to gain the superfluous."

"The whole secret is that Hermann is a German and therefore thrifty," interjected Count Tomski. "But my grandmother, Countess Anna Fedotovna, is more of a marvel than he. You must have noticed that she never touches a card."

"Indeed," replied the host, "it is a real miracle to meet a woman of eighty who never gambles!"

"You do not know why?"

"Not I. Is there a reason then?"

"Rather. Just listen to me. I would have you to know that my grandmother had a tremendous success during a visit to Paris sixty years ago. The Court haunted her footsteps in order to gaze on the 'Muscovite Venus,' and all manner of celebrities were said to have been in love with her.

"At that time the fashionable card game was faro, and playing at the palace one evening she lost a very considerable sum, on paper, to the Duke of Orleans, and on getting home told my grandfather of her bad luck and demanded the wherewithal to pay her debt of honour. My late grandfather acted as a sort of man of business for his wife; he was always rather in terror of her, but on this occasion the avowal of the sum she had just lost fairly made his hair stand on end, and he flew into a rage. He produced his account books and proved to my grandmother that in less than six months she had spent over fifty thousand pounds, and he ended by refusing to give her the money. You can imagine her fury. She boxed his ears and locked herself in her bedroom.

"The next day she tried a new attack and, for the first time in her life, deigned to make use of entreaties and explanations. She vainly tried to make her husband see that this was a debt of honour and that one should be more punctilious in dealing with a prince of the blood royal than with chance-comers. All her eloquence was wasted, for my grandfather was inflexible. My grandmother was at her wits' end.

"Fortunately, she was acquainted with one of the most celebrated men of the time. You have heard of the Count de St. Germain of whom so many stories are told. You know that he gave himself out to be a sort of Wandering Jew, who had discovered the Elixir of Life and the Philosophers' Stone. Some said he was an impostor; others

called him a spy. Whatever he may have been he was a man greatly in demand and of a kindly nature. In her quandary, my grandmother applied to him hoping that he would advance her the money she needed.

" ' Madame,' declared St. Germain, after a pause for reflection, ' I could easily advance you the necessary sum, but I know that you would never be at peace till you had repaid me, and I do not wish to help you out of one embarrassment only to involve you in another. There is, however, a way of escape. You must win back this money.'

" ' But, my dear Count,' replied my grandmother, ' I have already told you that I haven't a single louis d'or left.'

" St. Germain replied that money was quite unnecessary, and then he told her a secret, which I venture to say all of you would give a great deal to know."

Seeing that all the young men were hanging on his words, Tomski paused to light a pipe, blew out a cloud of smoke, and continued his story.

" The same evening my grandmother went to gamble in the Queen's apartments at Versailles. The Duke of Orleans was banker, and having made some excuse for not paying him, my grandmother began to play. She chose three cards. The first won ; she doubled her stake on the second, won again ; doubled on the third—in short, she won back more than she had lost."

" Utter chance ! " cried one of the party.

" What a wonderful tale ! " exclaimed Hermann.

" The cards must have been marked," said a third.

" You mean to tell us," shouted the host, " that you have a grandmother who knows three cards that are infallible winners and you have not yet been told what they are ! "

" That's the mischief of it ! " replied Tomski. " She had four sons, all gamblers, and not one of them could discover her secret, which would have been of great use to them, and to me, too. But one of my uncles told me as a fact that she had once made an exception in the case of the spendthrift Tchaplitski ; don't ask me the reason why. He had lost three hundred thousand roubles to a friend at a sitting and, not unnaturally, was in despair. My grandmother told him three cards to bet on, one after the other, and took his word that he would never gamble again afterwards. He sought out his former antagonist, demanded his revenge, and, to make a long story short, with the three cards he won back his losses and something more. But there's six striking ! It's time all of us were in bed."

The glasses were emptied and the party broke up.

II

THE old Countess Anna Fedotovna was sitting in her dressing-room before the glass, surrounded by three maids ; one held a pot of rouge, another a box of black pins, the third an enormous bonnet of lace trimmed with flame-coloured ribbons. No one could have called the Countess beautiful ; but she still preserved her youthful coquetry, dressed herself in the fashions of fifty years back, and gave an infinite amount of time and pains to her toilette.

In the embrasure of one of the windows her companion, Lisabeta Ivanovna, was stitching at a piece of needlework.

" Good morning, Grandmama," said Tomski, entering. " Good morning, Mademoiselle Lise. I have a request to make, Grandmama. I want an invitation for one of my friends to your ball."

" Bring him with you and present him to me there. Were you at the Princess's ball last night ? "

" Yes ; a delightful evening ! We danced till five. That Eletski girl is perfectly charming."

" On my honour, you are not hard to please ! If you want real beauty you should look at her grandmother, the Princess Daria Petrovna—but, dear me, she must be very old now ! "

" Old ! " echoed Tomski, in stupefaction. " She has been in her grave for the last seven years ! "

Lisabeta looked up and made a sign to the young officer, whereat he remembered that the death of her contemporaries was never mentioned to the old woman. He could have bitten off his tongue, but the Countess took the news coolly.

" Dead ? I hadn't heard a word of it. We were appointed Ladies in Waiting at the same time, and when we were presented the Empress . . ."

And for the hundredth time the Countess told her grandson a story of her youth. Then, accompanied by the three maids, she went behind a screen to complete her toilette, and Tomski was left alone with the companion.

" Who is this gentleman you wish to

present to Madame?" asked Lisabeta Ivanovna in a low voice.

"Naroumof. Do you know him?"

"No. Is he . . . is he . . . in the army?"

"Yes."

"In the . . . Engineers?"

"No. In the Horse Guards. What made you think he was in the Engineers?"

A smile passed across Lisabeta's face, but she did not answer.

"Well, good-bye, Grandmama. I am rather pressed for time," Tomski called out round the screen. "Good-bye, Lisabeta Ivanovna. But why, oh why did you expect Naroumof to be in the Engineers?"

And Tomski took himself off.

Lisabeta, when she found herself alone, took up her work again and sat down in the window. The same instant a young officer came into the street round the corner of another house. At sight of him the girl blushed to the roots of her hair, lowered her head and almost hid her face behind her embroidery-frame.

The young officer in the street was the true answer to Tomski's unanswered question.

Lisabeta had no enviable existence. Who can describe the trials that beset the poor companion to an old lady of quality? Though the Countess was not ill-natured, she had all the caprices of a spoilt child of fortune, and was mean, self-seeking and egotistical, as are most people who have ceased to play an active part in high society. She never missed a ball, where, highly painted and clad in out-of-date fashions, she preened herself in a corner, a veritable *memento mori*. She was at home to all the town; demanded the most rigid etiquette; and was quite incapable of attaching a name to its corresponding face.

Lisabeta's life with her was one continual torture. She presided over the tea-table and was scolded about wasted sugar. She read novels to the Countess and was held responsible for all the authors' absurdities. In society the girl's lot was just as unhappy. Every one knew her; no one paid her any attention. She danced, but only when required to make up a set. Her proper pride aggravated the misery of her situation. Her great desire was to find a liberator who would break her chains; but the young men were never serious in their attentions, though Lisabeta was much prettier than many of the pert and stupid heiresses to whom they paid homage. More than once she had fled away from the splendour and boredom of the drawing-room to shut herself up in her own little room, meanly furnished with an old screen, a patched carpet, a little mirror and bed and chest of drawers of cheap painted wood; there, by the light of a tallow dip in a brass candlestick, she could weep unhindered.

Now it had happened one morning, two days after the card party in Naroumof's rooms and a week before the scene which has just been described, that Lisabeta, seated with her needlework in the window, on casting a chance glance into the street, had become aware of an officer of the Engineers standing there motionless with his eyes fixed upon her. She lowered her head and hastily went on with her work. A few minutes later she gazed down into the street again, and the officer was in the same place. Not being accustomed to exchange glances with passing young men, she kept her eyes fixed on her stitches for the next two hours until it was time to prepare for dinner, when, rising to put away her embroidery-frame, she saw the officer still standing in the same attitude. After dinner she went to the window again, not without a certain emotion, but the officer was no longer there, and she dismissed the whole matter from her thoughts.

Two days later, as she was getting into the carriage with the Countess, she saw him standing right outside the door, a fur collar half hiding his face and pair of dark eyes burning from beneath the brim of his hat. Lisabeta was troubled without exactly knowing why, and she trembled as she took her seat in the carriage.

When they got home, she ran to the window with a beating heart: the officer was in his usual place and his fiery glance was fixed upon her. She drew back at once, burning with curiosity and a prey to a strange feeling which she was experiencing for the first time.

From then not a day passed but the young Engineer came prowling beneath her window. Before long a tacit acquaintanceship was established between them. Sitting at her needlework, she would sense his presence, would raise her head, and each successive day would let her eyes rest on him for a longer time. This harmless recognition of his existence seemed to delight the young man; with the swift

and unerring eye of youth she noted that a flush came to the pale cheeks of the officer every time that their glances met. By the end of a week she had gone to the length of smiling upon him.

The officer was Hermann.

Of German descent, he possessed only a very modest patrimony, had vowed not to encroach on his capital, lived within his income, and never allowed himself the least indulgence. He was reserved but full of ambition, and under an assumed calmness of demeanour concealed violent passions and a disordered imagination. Yet he had never lost control of himself and had always eschewed those extravagances which seem natural to youth. Thus it happened that, though a gambler by nature, he never touched a card, though he would spend whole nights beside the green-baize table, following with a feverish anxiety the varying chances of the game.

Hermann's imagination had been greatly excited by Tomski's story about St. Germain and his three cards, and he thought of nothing else the whole night. He was still thinking of it the evening of the next day, while wandering at random through the streets of St. Petersburgh.

"If only," he said to himself, "if only the old Countess would confide her secret to me! If only she would tell me the three winning cards! I must get myself presented to her, gain her confidence and make myself agreeable. She is eighty-seven years old! She might die this week—to-morrow, perhaps. But, after all, can there be a word of truth in that story? No: economy, temperance, work, those will have to be my three winning cards! They will help me to double and redouble my capital. By them I shall be assured of independence and happiness."

Philosophising in this way, he found himself in one of the principal streets in front of an old-fashioned house. Its windows were splendidly ablaze with light and the street was filled with carriages which were setting down their occupants in gala dress at its door. Hermann enquired from a night watchman whose house it was, and was told it belonged to the Countess Anna Fedotovna, Tomski's grandmother.

He shivered. The story of the three cards came into his mind again, and he wandered up and down in front of the house, thinking of its owner, of her wealth, of the mysterious secret she knew. When he returned to his mean rooms he lay sleepless for a long time, and even when slumber stole over his senses his dreams were all of cards, a green cloth, rouleaux of gold and piles of bank-notes. He saw himself times without number doubling his stake, always winning, and stuffing his pocket-book full of notes. He awoke with a groan to find that all these treasures were only fabrics of a vision, and, in order to distract his thoughts, went walking again through the streets. Some invincible power urged him forward, and he soon found himself standing once more before the Countess's house. He stopped and looked up at it.

At one of the windows he saw a girl's head, young, beautiful, with glorious dark hair; it was bent in a graceful attitude over a book, no doubt, or some needlework. Then the head was raised and showed him a clear complexion and dark eyes.

That moment decided his fate.

III

AT the street door, while two footmen, not without difficulty, were helping the old Countess to take her seat in the carriage, Lisabeta suddenly became aware that the young officer was quite close to her. She felt him seize her hand and trembled with fright; a second later he had disappeared leaving a note in her fingers. She made haste to hide it in her glove before mounting into the carriage in her turn.

During the whole drive she saw and heard nothing, and her replies to the Countess's innumerable questions were quite inconsequential, which annoyed the old lady exceedingly.

On their return, Lisabeta hastened to shut herself up in her room and drew the letter from her glove. It was unsealed, so of course it had to be read. It contained a declaration of love. The sentiments were high-minded and passionate, having been literally translated word for word from a German novel: but Lisabeta did not know German, and was highly delighted with the composition.

But she felt very embarrassed. For the first time in her life she had a secret. A letter from an unknown young man! She shivered to think of his boldness. Then she regretted her own imprudence, but could not think what she ought to do next.

Should she stop working at the window

and by means of a cold and haughty stare discourage the young officer from pursuing her . . . send him back his letter . . . let him have a firm and decisive reply . . . ? What was best to be done? She was without any friend or adviser but herself.

She determined to answer the letter.

She took pen and paper and sat down at her table deep in thought. More than one letter was begun and then torn up. Sometimes the missive seemed too cold, at others it seemed too lacking in reserve. Finally, she managed to compose a few lines which satisfied her.

"*I believe*," she wrote, "*that your intentions are those of an honourable man and that you have no wish to offend me by your rash behaviour ; but you must understand that our acquaintance cannot begin in this way. I return you your letter, and hope you will give me no cause to regret my imprudence.*"

The next day when she saw Hermann appear below she left her work, opened the window and threw the letter into the street, believing that the young officer would not let it go astray. Nor did he, for Hermann picked it up at once and went off to a restaurant to read it. As there was nothing very discouraging in the letter, he went home quite satisfied with the opening stages of his love affair.

Every day Lisabeta got a fresh letter, delivered sometimes in one way, sometimes in another. However, he sent her no more translations from the German, for all the letters vibrated with a violent passion and spoke a language which was all his own. This torrent of eloquence overcame Lisabeta's resistance. She was pleased at receiving these letters, and before long she began to reply to them. Every day these answers of hers became longer and more tender. At last she flung out of the window one which read as follows :

"*To-night there is a ball at the Ambassador's. The Countess is going. We shall remain there till two o'clock in the morning. Now to tell you how you can meet me without witnesses. When the Countess leaves for the ball, about eleven o'clock, all the servants will be busying themselves with their own concerns. The only one left here will be the Swiss in the vestibule, and he always is asleep in his box. Enter the house after eleven has struck and go up the stairs as quickly as you can. If you meet anyone in the ante-room, you can ask if the Countess is at home ; you will be told, of course, that she is out, in which case you must be content to go away ; but in all probability you will meet no one. The Countess's maids are all together in a distant room. Once you have reached the ante-room, turn to the left and go on straight till you are in the Countess's bedroom. In it, behind a large screen, you will find two doors ; the one on the right opens into a dark, unused little room, the one on the left opens upon a corridor, at the end of which is a little winding staircase—it leads to my room.*"

IV

LIKE a tiger on the watch for prey, Hermann quivered with excitement while awaiting the appointed hour. From ten o'clock onwards he mounted guard outside the Countess's door. The wind was violent and snow fell in heavy flakes. The lamps glimmered dimly and the street was deserted.

At last the Countess's carriage appeared at the door. The watcher saw two footmen lift the withered, decrepit old spectre and deposit her among the cushions, a shapeless mass wrapped in heavy furs. An instant later Lisabeta, enveloped in a cloak with a wreath of flowers on her head, jumped in beside her like a flash of lightning. The door was shut and the carriage rolled heavily away over the soft snow.

Hermann went on walking up and down. Very soon he went to a lamp and looked at his watch. Twenty minutes to eleven. Leaning against the lamp-post, his eyes upon the dial, he watched the intervening moments pass away. Exactly at eleven o'clock Hermann went up the steps of the house, opened the door and entered the vestibule, which was brilliantly lighted. To his joy no Swiss was to be seen. With a firm and rapid step he climbed the stairs and in a few seconds found himself in the ante-room, where a footman was lying asleep in a dirty old armchair. Hermann went quickly past him and through the dining-room and salon, where there were no lights, picking his way by the glimmer from the ante-room. At last he reached the bedroom.

A golden lamp was burning there before a shrine filled with antique ikons. Gilded armchairs and couches, covered with multi-coloured tapestries and embroidered in Chinese silks, were ranged along the walls. In every corner were to be seen vases,

china, clocks, baskets, fans, and the thousand other playthings that women love.

Hermann went behind the screen which concealed a little iron bedstead. He noted the two doors; to the right the one leading to the dark closet, to the left the one opening on the corridor. He opened this latter door and had a view of the little stairway which led to the poor companion's room; then he shut the door again and went into the dark closet.

The time passed slowly. All was quiet in the house. The clock in the salon struck midnight, and then all was quiet again. Hermann stood in the dark little room, leaning against an unlit stove. His heart was beating with the regularity of that of a man who has made up his mind to face all dangers, because he knows them to be inevitable.

Thus he heard one o'clock strike, then two; and soon afterwards came the distant sound of carriage wheels. Then, in spite of himself, he began to feel excited. The carriage approached the house rapidly and then halted. Immediately after there was a great noise of servants bustling downstairs and confused voices; the three maids came into the bedroom, all at the same time; finally, the Countess herself appeared, seeming a veritable walking mummy, and sank into an easy chair. Hermann watched everything through a crack in the door. He saw Lisabeta passing quite close to him and heard her feet hurrying up the winding staircase. At the bottom of his heart he felt something that was akin to remorse; but the feeling was not long in passing away. Once again his heart grew hard as stone.

Like most old people, the Countess suffered from sleeplessness. After all preparations for bed had been made she ordered the maids to roll her armchair to one of the windows and dismissed them. The candles were put out and the only illumination left in the room came from the lamp which was burning before the shrine with the ikons.

The Countess, all yellow and shrivelled up, with her under lip drooping, kept swaying herself gently from side to side: her eyes were vacant and her movements seemed to be the result of some hidden mechanism rather than an effort of the will.

All at once her mummified countenance changed its expression. Her lips ceased to tremble and the eyes became alive. An unknown person had suddenly appeared before her: it was Hermann.

"Do not fear, Madame," said he in tones which were low but distinct, "for heaven's sake, do not be afraid. I have no wish to do you the slightest injury. On the contrary, I want to beg a favour of you."

The old woman looked at him in silence, as if she did not understand. He thought she was deaf, and bending down to her ear repeated what he had said. The Countess remained silent.

"You can ensure me happiness for the whole of my life," continued Hermann, "without costing yourself anything. I know that you can tell me the three cards which . . ."

He stopped. No doubt the Countess understood what was wanted of her; perhaps she was searching for a fitting reply.

She said: "It was a jest . . . I swear it was a jest."

"No, Madame," replied Hermann angrily. "Have you forgotten Tchaplitski, whom you taught how to win?"

The Countess seemed troubled. For a moment her features showed traces of a lively emotion, but quickly reassumed their dense immobility.

"Can you not tell me," said Hermann, "the three winning cards?"

The Countess remained silent, and he went on:

"Why keep the secret to yourself? For your grandsons? They are rich enough without it. They do not know the value of money. What use would your three cards be to them? But I . . . I am a steady fellow and know the value of money. Come, tell me what they are."

He stopped, in trembling expectation of a reply. Not a word came from the Countess.

Hermann fell on his knees.

"If your heart has ever known love, if you recall its sweet delights, if the cry of a new-born babe has ever brought a smile to your lips, if any human feeling has ever affected your heart, I implore you by the love of a husband, lover, mother, by all that is sacred in life, not to refuse my entreaty! Tell me your secret. Perhaps some terrible sin attaches to it—the loss of eternal happiness? Have you had to make a compact with the Powers of Evil? If so . . . think, you are old and have not much longer to live, and I . . . I am ready to

take upon my own soul all your sins and to answer for them solely before God! Tell me the secret! Think that the happiness of a man depends upon you, not mine alone but that of my children and grandchildren, all of whom may bless your memory and venerate you as a saint!"

The old Countess said not a word in reply.

Hermann got up from the floor.

"You cursed old hag," he cried, grating his teeth. "I know how I shall make you talk!"

And he drew a pistol from his pocket.

The sight of the pistol seemed to animate the Countess for the second time. Her head trembled more violently, she stretched out her hands as though to ward off the weapon, then all at once she fell back and lay still without a movement.

"Come! Stop being so childish!" declared Hermann seizing her hands. "I demand it for the last time. Will you tell me the three cards or not?"

The Countess made no reply. And then Hermann saw that she was dead.

V

LISABETA IVANOVNA was sitting in her room, still clad in her ball-dress. She was plunged deep in thought.

On returning home she had lost no time in sending away her maid, saying she needed no help in undressing, and had gone upstairs to her room, dreading the meeting with Hermann, even hoping not to find him there. The first glance showed his absence and made her thank the chance which had made him fail at the tryst. She sat down full of thought and without thinking of removing her ballroom finery began to review in memory all the incidents of the liaison, which had lasted but for such a short time and yet had gone so far.

She was sitting there, her hands ungloved, her shoulders bare, her head with its wreath of flowers sunk upon her breast, when all at once the door opened and Hermann came into the room.

She started up full of fright.

"Where have you been?" she demanded, shaking all over.

"In the Countess's bedroom," replied Hermann. "I have just left her. She is dead."

"Gracious God—What do you mean?"

"I am afraid I was the cause of it," he went on calmly.

Lisabeta stared at him in bewilderment. Hermann sat down by the window and coolly told her everything.

Lisabeta listened in terror. So those passionate letters, those burning phrases, that bold pursuit and obstinate courtship—none of those had been inspired by love. His soul had been glowing only with greed of gold. She had only her heart to give him, and would that be enough to make him happy? Poor child! She felt that she had been a mere tool in the hands of a robber—the murderer of her aged patroness—and wept bitterly in the agony of her repentance.

Hermann silently watched her weeping; but neither the tears of the unhappy girl nor her beauty, which was rendered more attractive by her grief, could shake his iron soul. He felt regret only when he thought of the dead Countess. One reflection alone was a torture, that the secret was lost for ever which he had expected to give him a fortune.

"Oh you are a monster!" cried Lisabeta after an interval of silence.

"I had no intention of killing her" came the icy reply. "My pistol was not loaded."

They remained thus for some time without speaking to or looking at one another. Dawn began to appear. Lisabeta put out the candle which was guttering in its socket. She dried the tears from her eyes and fixed them upon Hermann.

"How are you to get away from here?" she said to him at last. "I had intended to let you out by the private stair, but it would be necessary to go through the Countess's room, and—I am afraid."

"I will go alone, if you will tell me where this private stair is to be found."

She rose, and taking a key from a drawer gave it to Hermann with the necessary instructions. He pressed her icy hand, placed a kiss upon her forehead, and left the room.

He descended the winding staircase and entered the Countess's chamber. She was seated upright quite stiffly in her armchair and her features were not in the least distorted. He stood looking at her for a few minutes so as to satisfy himself about the terrible reality; then he entered the dark room and found behind the tapestry a little door which opened upon a stair.

At the bottom of the stair was another door which opened to his key. Then came a corridor, and soon he was in the street.

VI

AT nine o'clock in the morning, three days after this fatal night, Hermann entered the church where all the fashionable world had assembled to pay its last respects to the remains of the old Countess. He felt no remorse, though he was fully aware that he had been the poor woman's murderer. Lacking any belief in religion, he had, as usually happens in such cases, more than an ordinary amount of superstition. He was firmly persuaded that the dead Countess might exercise an evil influence on his fortunes, and imagined he would appease her ghost by attending the funeral.

The church was full of people and he had great difficulty in finding a seat. The corpse was laid out on a splendid bier under a canopy of velvet. There the Countess was lying, with hands folded, robed in a white satin dress with her head enveloped in costly lace.

The service closed with the customary prayer after a famous preacher had delivered the funeral oration extolling the virtues of the departed. Then the relatives approached to bid a last farewell to the dead.

Hermann advanced in his turn towards the coffin. He knelt for a moment on the tiled floor which was strewn with fir branches. Then, rising, pale as death, he went up the steps of the catafalque and bent forward to look on the dead . . . and all at once it seemed to him as if the corpse opened its eyes and glared at him.

He started back and fell headlong down the steps. Great confusion arose as he was helped to arise, and during the excitement Lisabeta fainted. This accident somewhat disturbed the pomp of the obsequies. Malicious people were not lacking who whispered that this young officer who had been so affected must be a *very* near, though unacknowledged, relation of the dead Countess.

For the rest of the day Hermann was tormented by a feeling of uneasiness. Contrary to his habits, he drank deeply in the lonely restaurant where he dined, hoping to stupefy himself; but the wine only fanned his flaming imagination and gave redoubled vigour to the ideas with which he was preoccupied. He went home early, flung himself fully clothed upon his bed and fell into a heavy slumber.

When he awoke it was deep in the night and the moonlight was flooding his room. He looked at his watch; it was a quarter to three. All desire for sleep had deserted him, so he sat up on his bed and began to think about the old Countess.

At that moment some one in the street came to the window, as if to look into the room, and then passed on immediately. Hermann scarcely paid any attention. A minute later he heard some one open the door of the outer room. He thought at first it was his orderly, drunk as usual, returning from some nocturnal excursion; but then he quickly realised that the step was unknown to him. Someone was entering with a shuffling of feet along the floor.

The door opened and a woman clad in white came into his room.

For a moment Hermann thought it must be his old nurse, and wondered what could have brought her there at that time of the night; but the woman in white, crossing the floor rapidly, was at the foot of his bed in an instant—and then, Hermann saw that it was the Countess.

"I come to visit you unwillingly," she said in a firm voice. "I am compelled to grant your request. Three . . . Seven . . . Ace . . . these cards will win for you, one after the other; but you must not lay a stake on more than one of these cards in twenty-four hours, and afterwards you must never gamble again! I forgive you my death, provided you marry my companion, Lisabeta Ivanovna."

With these words she retreated towards the door, still shuffling her feet along the floor, and disappeared. Hermann heard her shut the outside door, and a second later he saw a white figure pass along the street, pausing for an instant at the window, as if to look in at him.

For a space he remained quite dumbfounded; then he rose and went into the outer room. His orderly was lying in a drunken sleep on the floor. He had great trouble in arousing him, and could get no sensible reply from him. The outer door was locked.

Hermann went back into his own room and immediately wrote down all the circumstances of his vision.

VII

IN the spiritual world two fixed ideas can no more exist at one and the same time than can two bodies in the physical world occupy the same space.

Three . . . seven . . . ace . . . the idea conveyed by these words soon effaced all memory of the Countess's last moments in Hermann's mind.

Three . . . seven . . . ace . . . the words never left his thoughts for an instant and sprang to his lips every moment of the day. If he met a pretty girl in the street he would murmur: "What a lovely figure: just like the three of hearts!" If asked the time: "A quarter to seven of diamonds" would be his answer. Every fat man he met reminded him of the ace of spades.

All his thoughts tended to one end: how to make use of the knowledge so dearly acquired? He thought of asking for leave and travelling abroad. At Paris, he thought, he might easily find some gaming-house where it would be possible to make a fortune by winning only three stakes. But chance solved his difficulty.

In Moscow was to be found a school of wealthy gamblers, chief of whom was a certain Tchekalinski who was worth millions, for all through a long life devoted to gaming he had won in notes and lost in silver. He had a magnificent house and an excellent chef and was generally popular and respected. This man came on a visit to St. Petersburg. His salon was immediately crowded by the *jeunesse dorée* of the capital who deserted balls and flirtations for the green-covered tables.

Hermann was brought to Tchekalinski's house by Naroumof.

They passed through a long suite of rooms filled with polite, obsequious servants. The whole place was crowded with guests. Generals and Privy-Councillors were playing whist; young men lay about on sofas eating ices and smoking long pipes In the principal reception room, behind a long green table, in front of which was grouped a score of players, the host was acting banker in a game of faro. He was a man of about sixty, with a kindly, aristocratic face and hair as white as snow. Good temper and benevolence beamed from his plump and ruddy countenance. Naroumof introduced Hermann to him, and Tchekalinski shook his hand, bade him welcome, told him to make himself at home, and began to cut the cards again.

It took some time to complete the deal, for more than thirty cards had been backed. After each card Tchekalinski stopped in order to give the winners time to double, paid his losses, listened civilly to the losers' grumbling, and even more civilly straightened the corners of the cards bent by careless hands. When the deal was over, he shuffled the cards and prepared to deal again.

"Will you allow me to take a card?" asked Hermann, stretching out his arm over a big man who was monopolizing most of the table.

Tchekalinski smiled graciously at him and bowed assent. Naroumof laughed and congratulated his friend on having got rid of his former moral austerity and wished him all sorts of good luck on his initiation into the mysteries of gaming.

"There you are!" said Hermann, having written a figure to represent his stake on the back of his card.

"How much?" asked the banker, blinking his eyes. "Excuse me, I cannot see clearly."

"Forty-seven thousand roubles," said Hermann.

At these words every head was raised and every eye fixed upon the speaker.

"He has gone mad!" thought Naroumof.

"Permit me to inform you, sir," said Tchekalinski with his wonted smile, "that your game is too high. The limit in this game has been fixed at two hundred and seventy-five roubles."

"Very well," replied Hermann; "but will you accept my stake all the same? Yes or no."

Tchekalinski bowed to show that he accepted the bet.

"I only wished to let you know," he said, "that, though I am perfectly certain of my friends, I cannot deal a card until ready money has been produced. I am perfectly sure that your word is enough, but in order to make the game regular and to save calculations I should be obliged if you would set your stake upon the card."

Hermann drew a packet of bank-notes from his pocket and presented it to Tchekalinski, who examined it and placed it upon the card.

He dealt. To the right was a ten, to the left a three.

"I win," said Hermann showing his card.

A murmur of astonishment ran round the players. The banker's brows contracted for a moment, but then his habitual smile reappeared.

"Shall I square the account?" he asked of the winner.

"If you please."

Tchekalinski produced bank-notes from his pocket-book and paid on the nail. Hermann pocketed his winnings and left the table, drank a glass of lemonade, and went home.

The next evening he returned to Tchekalinski's house and found him still engaged in dealing. Hermann went up to his table, and this time the punters made room for him without having to be asked. Tchekalinski bowed to him, almost with deference.

Hermann waited till a fresh deal started, then he chose a card on which he staked his forty-seven thousand roubles as well as his winnings of the previous evening.

Tchekalinski began to deal. A knave came to the right, a seven to the left.

Hermann showed a seven.

There was a general exclamation of surprise at this win. It was quite evident that Tchekalinski was perturbed. He counted out ninety-four thousand roubles and handed them to Hermann, who received them with the utmost calmness, got up from the table and left the house immediately.

He reappeared the next evening at the usual time. Every one was expecting him. Even the Generals and Privy-Councillors had deserted their whist to watch this extraordinary gambling. The young officers had given up lolling on the sofas. All had crowded into the gaming-room and surrounded Hermann. When he came in all the other punters stopped playing, impatient to see his duel with the banker, who, pale but ever smiling, watched Hermann's approach to the table and got ready to play against him alone.

Each of the two opponents spread out a pack of cards at the same time.

Hermann took a card and covered it with a bundle of notes. Tchekalinski began to deal with trembling hands. To the right a queen came out, to the left an ace.

"The ace wins," said Hermann, and lifted his card.

"Your queen has lost," replied Tchekalinski, in the most honied tones.

Hermann shivered all over. Instead of an ace, which he thought he had taken, in front of him lay the queen of spades! He could not believe his eyes nor understand how he had come to make such a mistake.

Gazing at the fatal card, it seemed to him that the queen of spades winked one of her eyes and glared at him with a mocking expression. In horror, he recognised a likeness between this queen and the dead Countess. . . .

"The infernal old hag!" he cried in his rage.

Tchekalinski gathered up his winnings. Hermann stood motionless for a space with every emotion paralysed. When at last he left the table conversation burst forth. It was a record gamble, the players agreed. Tchekalinski shuffled the cards and the game continued.

¶

Hermann's end was in an asylum, where he would refuse to answer any questions and spent all the time muttering to himself:

"Three . . . Seven Ace! Three . . . Seven . . . Ace!"

¶ READERS should order now the March number of THE STORY-TELLER, which will be on sale February 14. The special feature is a new complete story by ARNOLD BENNETT entitled "A Place in Venice."

¶ One of the last stories written by the late W. L. George is also included in the number: "A Day in the Life of Mankind," a brilliant and unusual story. Ernest Bramah contributes a further adventure of his blind detective, Max Carrados. The first part of a fine story of the West—"The Crippled Lady of Peribonka"—by James Oliver Curwood, is another special feature.

¶ There are other complete stories by Albert Richard Wetjen, Olive Wadsley, Frank H. Shaw, S. Walkey, etc.

The Attack on the Mill

War and love in a French village

By ÉMILE ZOLA

IT was high holiday at Father Merlier's mill on that pleasant summer afternoon. Three tables had been brought out into the garden and placed end to end in the shadow of the great elm, and now they were awaiting the arrival of the guests. It was known throughout the length and breadth of the land that that day was to witness the betrothal of old Merlier's daughter, Françoise, to Dominique, a young man who was said to be not over-fond of work, but whom never a woman for three leagues of the country around could look at without sparkling eyes, such a well-favoured young fellow was he.

That mill of Father Merlier's was truly a very pleasant spot. It was situated right in the heart of Rocreuse, at the place where the main road makes a sharp bend. The village has but a single street, bordered on either side by a row of low, whitened cottages, but just there where the road curves, there are broad stretches of meadow-land, and huge trees, which follow the course of the Morelle, cover the low grounds of the valley with a most delicious shade. All Lorraine has no more charming bit of nature to show. To right and left dense forests, great monarchs of the wood, centuries old, rise from the gentle slopes and fill the horizon with a sea of verdure, while away towards the south extends the plain, of wondrous fertility and checkered almost to infinity with its small enclosures, divided off from one another by their live hedges. But what makes the crowning glory of Rocreuse is the coolness of this verdurous nook, even in the hottest days of July and August. The Morelle comes down from the woods of Gagny, and it would seem as if it gathered to itself on the way all the delicious freshness of the foliage beneath which it glides for many a league; it brings down with it the murmuring sounds, the glacial, solemn shadows of the forest. And that is not the only source of coolness; there are running waters of all kinds singing among the copses; one cannot take a step without coming on a gushing spring, and as he makes his way along the narrow paths he seems to be treading above subterranean lakes that seek the air and sunshine through the moss above and profit by every smallest crevice, at the roots of trees or among the chinks and crannies of the rocks, to burst forth in fountains of crystalline clearness. So numerous and so loud are the whispering voices of these streams that they silence the song of the bullfinches. It is as if one were in an enchanted park, with cascades falling on every side.

The meadows below are never athirst. The shadows beneath the gigantic chestnut trees are of inky blackness, and along the edges of the fields long rows of poplars stand like walls of rustling foliage. There is a double avenue of huge plane trees ascending across the fields towards the ancient castle of Gagny, now gone to rack and ruin. In this region, where drought is never known, vegetation of all kinds is wonderfully rank; it is like a flower garden down there in the low ground between those two wooded hills, a natural garden, where the lawns are broad meadows and the giant trees represent colossal beds. Where the noonday sun pours down his scorching rays the shadows lie blue upon the ground, the glowing vegetation slumbers in the heat, while every now and then a breath of icy coldness passes under the foliage.

Such was the spot where Father Merlier's mill enlivened with its cheerful clack nature run riot. The building itself, constructed of wood and plaster, looked as if it might be coeval with our planet. Its foundations were in part washed by the Morelle, which here expands into a clear pool. A dam, a few feet in height, afforded sufficient head of water to drive the old wheel, which creaked and groaned as it revolved, with the asthmatic wheezing of a faithful servant who has grown old in her

place. Whenever Father Merlier was advised to change it, he would shake his head and say that like as not a young wheel would be lazier and not so well acquainted with its duties, and then would set to work and patch up the old one with anything that came to hand, old hogshead-staves, bits of rusty iron, zinc or lead. The old wheel only seemed the gayer for it, with its old profile, all plumed and feathered with tufts of moss and grass, and when the water poured over it in a silvery tide its gaunt black skeleton was decked out with a gorgeous display of pearls and diamonds.

That portion of the mill which was bathed by the Morelle had something of the look of a barbaric arch that had been dropped down there by chance. A good half of the structure was built on piles; the water came in under the floor, and there were deep holes, famous throughout the whole country for the eels and the huge crawfish that were to be caught there. Below the fall the pool was as clear as a mirror, and when it was not clouded by foam from the wheel one could see troops of great fish swimming about in it with the slow, majestic movements of a squadron. There was a broken stairway leading down to the stream, near a stake to which a boat was fastened, and over the wheel was a gallery of wood. Such windows as there were were arranged without any attempt at order. The whole was a quaint conglomeration of nooks and corners, bits of wall, additions made here and there as after-thoughts, beams and roofs, that gave the mill the aspect of an old dismantled citadel; but ivy and all sorts of creeping plants had grown luxuriantly and kindly covered up such crevices as were too unsightly, casting a mantle of green over the old dwelling. Young ladies who passed that way used to stop and sketch Father Merlier's mill in their albums.

The side of the house that faced the road was less irregular. A gateway in stone afforded access to the principal courtyard, on the right and left hand of which were sheds and stables. Beside a well stood an immense elm that threw its shade over half the court. At the further end, opposite the gate, stood the house surmounted by a dovecote, the four windows of its first floor in a symmetrical line. The only vanity that Father Merlier ever allowed himself was to paint this façade every ten years. It had just been freshly whitened at the time of our story, and dazzled the eyes of all the village.

¶

FOR twenty years had Father Merlier been mayor of Rocreuse. He was held in great consideration on account of his fortune; he was supposed to be worth something like eighty thousand francs, the result of patient saving. When he married Madeleine Guillard, who brought him the mill as her dowry, his entire capital lay in his two strong arms, but Madeleine had never repented of her choice, so manfully had he conducted their joint affairs. Now his wife was dead, and he was left a widower with his daughter Françoise. Doubtless he might have set himself down to take his rest and suffered the old mill-wheel to sleep among its moss, but he would have found idleness too irksome and the house would have seemed dead to him. He kept on working still for the pleasure of it. In those days Father Merlier was a tall old man, with a long, silent face, on which a laugh was never seen, but beneath which there lay, none the less, a large fund of good-humour. He had been elected mayor on account of his money, and also for the impressive air that he knew how to assume when it devolved on him to marry a couple.

Françoise Merlier had just completed her eighteenth year. She was small, and for that reason was not accounted one of the beauties of the country. Until she reached the age of fifteen she had been even homely; the good folks of Rocreuse could not see how it was that the daughter of Father and Mother Merlier, such a hale, vigorous couple, had such a hard time of it in getting her growth. When she was fifteen, however, though still remaining delicate, a change came over her and she took on the prettiest little face imaginable. She had black hair, black eyes, and was red as a rose withal; her mouth was always smiling, there were delicious dimples in her cheeks, and a crown of sunshine seemed to be ever resting on her fair, candid forehead. Although small as girls went in that region, she was far from being thin; she might not have been able to raise a sack of wheat to her shoulder, but she became quite plump as she grew older, and gave promise of becoming eventually as well-rounded

and appetising as a partridge. Her father's habits of taciturnity had made her reflective while yet a young girl; if she always had a smile on her lips it was in order to give pleasure to others. Her natural disposition was serious.

As was no more than to be expected, she had every young man in the country-side at her heels as a suitor, more even for her money than for her attractiveness, and she had made a choice at last, a choice that had been the talk and scandal of the entire neighbourhood.

On the other side of the Morelle lived a strapping young fellow who went by the name of Dominique Penquer. He was not to the manner born; ten years previously he had come to Rocreuse from Belgium to receive the inheritance of an uncle who had owned a small property on the very borders of the forest of Gagny, just facing the mill and distant from it only a few musket-shots. His object in coming was to sell the property, so he said, and return to his own home again; but he must have found the land to his liking, for he made no move to go away. He was seen cultivating his bit of a field and gathering the few vegetables that afforded him an existence. He fished, he hunted; more than once he was near coming in contact with the law through the intervention of the keepers. This independent way of living, of which the peasants could not very clearly see the resources, had in the end given him a bad name. He was vaguely looked upon as nothing better than a poacher. At all events he was lazy, for he was frequently found sleeping in the grass at hours when he should have been at work. Then, too, the hut in which he lived, in the shade of the last trees of the forest, did not seem like the abode of an honest young man; the old women would not have been surprised at any time to hear that he was on friendly terms with the wolves in the ruins of Gagny.

Still, the young girls would now and then venture to stand up for him, for he was altogether a splendid specimen of manhood, was this individual of doubtful antecedents, tall and straight as a young poplar, with a milk-white skin and ruddy hair and moustaches that seemed to be of gold when the sun shone on them. Now one fine morning it came to pass that Françoise told Father Merlier that she loved Dominique, and that never, never would she consent to marry any other young man.

It may be imagined what a knockdown blow it was that Father Merlier received that day! As was his wont, he said never a word; his countenance wore its usual reflective look, only the fun that used to bubble up from within no longer shone in his eyes. Françoise, too, was very serious, and for a week father and daughter scarcely spoke to each other. What troubled Father Merlier was to know how that rascal of a poacher had succeeded in bewitching his daughter. Dominique had never shown himself at the mill. The miller played the spy a little, and was rewarded by catching sight of the gallant, on the other side of the Morelle, lying among the grass and pretending to be asleep. Françoise could see him from her chamber window. The thing was clear enough; they had been making sheep's eyes at each other over the old mill-wheel, and so had fallen in love.

A week slipped by; Françoise became more and more serious. Father Merlier still continued to say nothing. Then, one evening, of his own accord, he brought Dominique to the house, without a word. Françoise was just setting the table. She made no demonstration of surprise; all she did was to add another plate, but her laugh had come back to her, and the little dimples appeared again upon her cheeks. Father Merlier had gone that morning to look for Dominique at his hut on the edge of the forest, and there the two men had had a conference, with closed doors and windows, that lasted three hours. No one ever knew what they said to each other; the only thing certain is that when Father Merlier left the hut he already treated Dominique as a son. Doubtless the old man had discovered that he whom he had gone to visit was a worthy young fellow, even though he did lie in the grass to gain the love of young girls.

All Rocreuse was up in arms. The women gathered at their doors and could not find words strong enough to characterise Father Merlier's folly in thus receiving a ne'er-do-well into his family. He let them talk. Perhaps he thought of his own marriage. Neither had he possessed a penny to his name at the time he married Madeleine and her mill, and yet that had

not prevented him from being a good husband to her. Moreover, Dominique put an end to their tittle-tattle by setting to work in such strenuous fashion that all the countryside was amazed. It so happened just then that the boy of the mill drew an unlucky number and had to go for a soldier, and Dominique would not hear of their engaging another. He lifted sacks, drove the cart, wrestled with the old wheel when it took an obstinate fit and refused to turn, and all so pluckily and cheerfully that people came from far and near merely for the pleasure of seeing him. Father Merlier laughed his silent laugh. He was highly elated that he had read the youngster aright. There is nothing like love to hearten up young men.

In the mist of all that laborious toil Françoise and Dominique fairly worshipped each other. They had not much to say, but their tender smiles conveyed a world of meaning. Father Merlier had not said a word thus far on the subject of their marriage, and they had both respected his silence, waiting until the old man should see fit to give expression to his will. At last, one day towards the middle of July, he had had three tables laid in the courtyard, in the shade of the big elm, and had invited his friends of Rocreuse to come that afternoon and drink a glass of wine with him. When the courtyard was filled with people, and every one there had a full glass in his hand, Father Merlier raised his own high above his head and said :

" I have the pleasure of announcing to you that Françoise and this lad will be married in a month from now, on St. Louis' fête-day."

Then there was a universal touching of glasses, attended by a tremendous uproar ; every one was laughing. But Father Merlier, raising his voice above the din, again spoke :

" Dominique, kiss your wife that is to be. It is no more than customary."

And they kissed, very red in the face, both of them, while the company laughed louder still. It was a regular fête ; they emptied a small cask. Then, when only the intimate friends of the house remained conversation went on in a calmer strain. Night had fallen, a starlit night, and very clear. Dominique and Françoise sat on a bench, side by side, and said nothing. An old peasant spoke of the war that the Emperor had declared against Prussia. All the lads of the village were already gone off to the army. Troops had passed through the place only the night before. There was going to be hard knocks.

" Bah ! " said Father Merlier, with the selfishness of a man who is quite happy, " Dominique is a foreigner ; he won't have to go—and if the Prussians come this way, he will be here to defend his wife."

The idea of the Prussians coming there seemed to the company an exceedingly good joke. The army would give them one good conscientious thrashing, and the affair would be quickly ended.

" I have seen them before, I have seen them before," the old peasant repeated, in a low voice.

There was silence for a little, then they all touched glasses once again. Françoise and Dominique had heard nothing ; they had managed to clasp hands behind the bench in such a way as not to be seen by the others, and this condition of affairs seemed so beautific to them that they sat there mute, their gaze lost in the darkness of the night.

What a magnificent balmy night ! The village lay slumbering on either side of the white road as peacefully as a little child. The deep silence was undisturbed save by the occasional crow of a cock in some distant barnyard acting on a mistaken impression that dawn was at hand. Perfumed breaths of air, like long-drawn sighs, came down from the great woods that lay around and above, sweeping softly over the roofs, as if caressing them. The meadows, with their black intensity of shadow, took on a dim, mysterious majesty of their own, while all the springs, all the brooks and water-courses that gurgled in the darkness, might have been taken for the cool rhythmical breathing of the sleeping country. Every now and then the old dozing mill-wheel seemed to be dreaming like a watch-dog that barks uneasily in his slumber ; it creaked, it talked to itself, rocked by the fall of the Morelle, whose current gave forth the deep, sustained music of an organ-pipe. Never was there a more charming or happier nook, never did a deeper peace come down to cover it.

II

ONE month later, to a day, on the eve of the fête of Saint Louis, Rocreuse was

in a state of alarm and dismay. The Prussians had beaten the Emperor, and were advancing on the village by forced marches. For a week past people passing along the road had brought tidings of the enemy: "They are at Lormières, they are at Nouvelles;" and by dint of hearing so many stories of the rapidity of their advance, Rocreuse woke up every morning in the full expectation of seeing them swarming down out of Gagny wood. They did not come, however, and that only served to make the affright the greater. They would certainly fall upon the village in the night-time, and put every soul to the sword.

There had been an alarm the night before, a little before daybreak. The inhabitants had been aroused by a great noise of men tramping upon the road. The women were already throwing themselves upon their knees and making the sign of the cross, when someone, to whom it happily occurred to peep through a half-opened window, caught sight of red trousers. It was a French detachment. The captain had forthwith asked for the mayor, and, after a long conversation with Father Merlier, had remained at the mill.

The sun shone bright and clear that morning, giving promise of a warm day. There was a golden light floating over the woodland, while in the low grounds white mists were rising from the meadows. The pretty village, so neat and trim, awoke in the cool dawning, and the country, with its streams and its fountains, was as gracious as a freshly plucked bouquet. But the beauty of the day brought gladness to the face of no one; the villagers had watched the captain, and seen him circle round and round the old mill, examine the adjacent houses, then pass to the other bank of the Morelle, and from thence scan the country with a field-glass; Father Merlier, who accompanied him, appeared to be giving explanations. After that the captain had posted some of his men behind walls, behind trees, or in hollows. The main body of the detachment had encamped in the courtyard of the mill. So there was going to be a fight, then? And when Father Merlier returned they questioned him. He spoke no word, but slowly and sorrowfully nodded his head. Yes, there was going to be a fight.

Françoise and Dominique were there in the courtyard, watching him. He finally took his pipe from his lips, and gave utterance to these few words:

"Ah! my poor children, I shall not be able to marry you to-day!"

Dominique, with lips tight set and an angry frown upon his forehead, raised himself on tiptoe from time to time and stood with eyes bent on Gagny wood, as if he would have been glad to see the Prussians appear and end the suspense they were in. Françoise, whose face was grave and very pale, was constantly passing back and forth, supplying the needs of the soldiers. They were preparing their soup in a corner of the courtyard, joking and chaffing one another while awaiting their meal.

The captain appeared to be highly pleased. He had visited the chambers and the great hall of the mill that looked out on the stream. Now, seated beside the well he was conversing with Father Merlier.

"You have a regular fortress here," he was saying.

"We shall have no trouble in holding it until evening. The bandits are late; they ought to be here by this time."

The miller looked very grave. He saw his beloved mill going up in flame and smoke, but uttered no word of remonstrance or complaint, considering that it would be useless. He only opened his mouth to say:

"You ought to take steps to hide the boat; there is a hole behind the wheel fitted to hold it. Perhaps you may find it of use to you."

The captain gave an order to one of his men. This captain was a tall, fine-looking man of about forty, with an agreeable expression of countenance. The sight of Dominique and Françoise seemed to afford him much pleasure; he watched them as if he had forgotten all about the approaching conflict. He followed Françoise with his eyes as she moved about the courtyard, and his manner showed clearly enough that he thought her charming. Then, turning to Dominique:

"You are not with the army, I see, my boy?" he abruptly asked.

"I am a foreigner," the young man replied.

The captain did not seem particularly pleased with the answer; he winked his eyes and smiled. Françoise was doubtless a more agreeable companion than a musket would have been. Dominique, noticing his smile, made haste to add:

"I am a foreigner, but I can lodge a rifle bullet in an apple at five hundred yards. See, there's my rifle behind you."

"You may find use for it," the captain drily answered.

Françoise had drawn near; she was trembling a little, and Dominique, regardless of the bystanders, took and held firmly clasped in his own the two hands that she held forth to him, as if committing herself to his protection. The captain smiled again, but said nothing more. He remained seated, his sword between his legs, his eyes fixed on space.

q

IT was ten o'clock. The heat was already oppressive. A deep silence prevailed. The soldiers had sat down in the shade of the sheds in the courtyard and begun to eat their soup. Not a sound came from the village, where the inhabitants had all barricaded their houses, doors and windows. A dog, abandoned by his master, howled mournfully upon the road. From the woods and the nearby meadows, that lay fainting in the heat, came a long-drawn, whispering, soughing sound, produced by the union of what wandering breaths of air there were. A cuckoo called. Then the silence became deeper still.

And all at once, upon that lazy, sleepy air, a shot rang out. The captain rose quickly to his feet, the soldiers left their half-emptied plates. In a few seconds all were at their posts; the mill was occupied from top to bottom. And yet the captain, who had gone out through the gate, saw nothing; to right and left the road stretched away, desolate and blindingly white in the fierce sunshine. A second report was heard, and still nothing to be seen, not even so much as a shadow; but just as he was turning to re-enter he chanced to look over toward Gagny and there beheld a little puff of smoke floating away on the tranquil air, like thistledown. The deep peace of the forest was apparently unbroken.

"The rascals have occupied the wood," the officer murmured. "They know we are here."

Then the firing went on, and became more and more continuous between the French soldiers posted about the mill and the Prussians concealed among the trees. The bullets whistled over the Morelle without doing any mischief on either side. The firing was irregular; every bush seemed to have its marksman, and nothing was to be seen save those bluish smoke wreaths that hung for a moment on the wind before they vanished. It lasted thus for nearly two hours. The officer hummed a tune with a careless air. Françoise and Dominique, who had remained in the courtyard, raised themselves to look out over a low wall. They were more particularly interested in a little soldier who had his post on the bank of the Morelle, behind the hull of an old boat; he would lie face downward on the ground, watch his chance, deliver his fire, then slip back into a ditch a few steps in his rear to reload, and his movements were so comical, he displayed such cunning and activity, that it was difficult for any one watching him to refrain from smiling. He must have caught sight of a Prussian, for he rose quickly and brought his piece to the shoulder, but before he could discharge it he uttered a loud cry, whirled completely around in his tracks and fell backward into the ditch, where for an instant his legs moved convulsively, just as the claws of a fowl do when it is beheaded. The little soldier had received a bullet directly through his heart. It was the first casualty of the day. Françoise instinctively seized Dominique's hand, and held it tight in a convulsive grasp.

"Come away from there," said the captain. "The bullets reach us here."

As if to confirm his words a slight, sharp sound was heard up in the old elm, and the end of a branch came to the ground, turning over and over as it fell, but the two young people never stirred, riveted to the spot as they were by the interest of the spectacle. On the edge of the wood a Prussian had suddenly emerged from behind a tree, as an actor comes upon the stage from the wings, beating the air with his arms and falling over upon his back. And beyond that there was no movement; the two dead men appeared to be sleeping in the bright sunshine; there was not a soul to be seen in the fields on which the heat lay heavy. Even the sharp rattle of the musketry had ceased. Only the Morelle kept on whispering to itself with its low, musical murmur.

Father Merlier looked at the captain with an astonished air, as if to inquire whether that were the end of it.

"Here comes their attack," the officer

murmured. "Look out for yourself! Don't stand there!"

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when a terrible discharge of musketry ensued. The great elm was riddled, its leaves came eddying down as thick as snowflakes. Fortunately the Prussians had aimed too high. Dominique dragged, almost carried, Françoise from the spot, while Father Merlier followed them, shouting:

"Get into the small cellar, the walls are thicker there."

But they paid no attention to him; they made their way to the main hall, where ten or a dozen soldiers were silently waiting, watching events outside through the chinks of the closed shutters. The captain was left alone in the courtyard, where he sheltered himself behind the low wall, while the furious fire was maintained uninterruptedly. The soldiers whom he had posted outside only yielded their ground inch by inch; they came crawling in, however, one after another, as the enemy dislodged them from their positions. Their instructions were to gain all the time they could, taking care not to show themselves, in order that the Prussians might remain in ignorance of the force they had opposed to them. Another hour passed, and as a sergeant came in, reporting that there were now only two or three men left outside, the officer took his watch from his pocket, murmuring:

"Half-past two. Come, we must hold out for four hours yet."

He caused the great gate of the courtyard to be tightly secured, and everything was made ready for an energetic defence. The Prussians were on the other side of the Morelle, consequently there was no reason to fear an assault at the moment. There was a bridge indeed, a mile and a quarter away, but they were probably unaware of its existence, and it was hardly to be supposed that they would attempt to cross the stream by fording. The officer, therefore, simply caused the road to be watched; the attack, when it came, was to be looked for from the direction of the fields.

The firing had ceased again. The mill appeared to lie there in the sunlight, void of all life. Not a shutter was open, not a sound came from within. Gradually however, the Prussians began to show themselves at the edge of Gagny wood. Heads were protruded here and there; they seemed to be mustering up their courage. Several of the soldiers within the mill brought their pieces to an aim, but the captain shouted:

"No, no; not yet; wait. Let them come nearer."

They displayed a great deal of prudence in their advance, looking at the mill with a distrustful air; they seemed hardly to know what to make of the old structure, so lifeless and gloomy, with its curtain of ivy. Still they kept on advancing. When there were fifty of them or so in the open, directly opposite, the officer uttered one word:

"Now!"

A crashing, tearing discharge burst from the position, succeeded by an irregular, dropping fire. Françoise trembling violently, involuntarily raised her hands to her ears. Dominique, from his position behind the soldiers, peered out upon the field, and when the smoke drifted away a little, counted three Prussians extended on their backs in the middle of the meadow. The others had sought shelter among the willows and the poplars. And then commenced the siege.

For more than an hour the mill was riddled with bullets; they beat and rattled on its old walls like hail. The noise they made was plainly audible as they struck the stonework, were flattened, and fell back into the water; they buried themselves in the woodwork with a dull thud. Occasionally a creaking sound would announce that the wheel had been hit. Within the building the soldiers husbanded their ammunition, firing only when they could see something to aim at. The captain kept consulting his watch every few minutes, and as a ball split one of the shutters in halves and then lodged in the ceiling:

"Four o'clock," he murmured. "We shall never be able to hold the position."

The old mill, in truth, was gradually going to pieces beneath that terrific fire. A shutter that had been perforated again and again, until it looked like a piece of lace, fell off its hinges into the water, and had to be replaced by a mattress. Every moment, almost, Father Merlier exposed himself to the fire in order to take account of the damage sustained by his poor wheel, every wound of which was like a bullet in his own heart. Its

period of usefulness was ended this time for certain; he would never be able to patch it up again. Dominique had besought Françoise to retire to a place of safety, but she was determined to remain with him; she had taken a seat behind a great oaken clothes-press, which afforded her protection. A ball struck the press, however, the sides of which gave out a dull hollow sound, whereupon Dominique stationed himself in front of Françoise. He had as yet taken no part in the firing, although he had his rifle in his hand; the soldiers occupied the whole breadth of the windows, so that he could not get near them. At every discharge the floor trembled.

"Look out! look out! the captain suddenly shouted.

He had just descried a dark mass emerging from the wood. As soon as they gained the open they set up a telling platoon fire. It struck the mill like a tornado. Another shutter parted company, and the bullets came whistling in through the yawning aperture. Two soldiers rolled upon the floor; one lay where he fell and never moved a limb; his comrades pushed him up against the wall because he was in the way. The other writhed and twisted, beseeching someone to end his agony, but no one had ears for the poor wretch; the bullets were still pouring in, and every one was looking out for himself and searching for a loophole whence he might answer the enemy's fire. A third soldier was wounded; that one said not a word, but with staring, haggard eyes sank down beneath a table. Françoise, horror-stricken by the dreadful spectacle of the dead and dying man, mechanically pushed away her chair and seated herself on the floor, against the wall; it seemed to her that she would be smaller there and less exposed. In the meantime men had gone and secured all the mattresses in the house; the opening of the window was partially closed again. The hall was filled with debris of every description, broken weapons, dislocated furniture.

"Five o'clock," said the captain. "Stand fast, boys. They are going to make an attempt to pass the stream."

Just then Françoise gave a shriek. A bullet had struck the floor, and, rebounding, grazed her forehead on the ricochet. A few drops of blood appeared. Dominique looked at her, then went to the window and fired his first shot, and from that time kept on firing uninterruptedly. He kept on loading and discharging his piece mechanically, paying no attention to what was passing at his side, only passing from time to time to cast a look at Françoise. He did not fire hurriedly or at random, moreover, but took deliberate aim. As the captain had predicted, the Prussians were skirting the belt of poplars and attempting the passage of the Morelle, but each time the one of them showed himself he fell with one of Dominique's bullets in his brain. The captain, who was watching the performance, was amazed; he complimented the young man, telling him that he would like to have many more marksmen of his skill. Dominique did not hear a word he said. A ball struck him in the shoulder, another raised a contusion on his arm. And still he kept on firing.

There were two more deaths. The mattresses were torn to shreds and no longer availed to stop the windows. The last volley that was poured in seemed as if it would carry away the mill bodily, so fierce it was. The position was no longer tenable. Still, the officer kept repeating:

"Stand fast. Another half-hour yet."

He was counting the minutes, one by one, now. He had promised his commanders that he would hold the enemy there until nightfall, and he would not budge a hair's-breadth before the moment that he had fixed on for his withdrawal. He maintained his pleasant air of good-humour, smiling at Françoise by way of reassuring her. He had picked up the musket of one of the dead soldiers and was firing away with the rest.

There were but four soldiers left in the room. The Prussians were showing themselves *en masse* on the other side of the Morelle, and it was evident that they might now pass the stream at any moment. A few moments more elapsed; the captain was as determined as ever, and would not give the order to retreat, when a sergeant came running into the room, saying:

"They are on the road; they are going to take us in the rear."

The Prussians must have discovered the bridge. The captain drew out his watch again.

"Five minutes more," he said. "They won't be here within five minutes."

Then exactly at six o'clock he at last

withdrew his men through a little postern that opened on a narrow lane, whence they threw themselves into the ditch, and in that way reached the forest of Sauval. The captain took leave of Father Merlier with much politeness, apologising profusely for the trouble he had caused. He even added :

" Try to keep them occupied for a while. We shall return."

While this was occurring Dominique had remained alone in the hall. He was still firing away, hearing nothing, conscious of nothing ; his sole thought was to defend Françoise. The soldiers were all gone, and he had not the remotest idea of the fact ; he aimed and brought down his man at every shot. All at once there was a great tumult. The Prussians had entered the courtyard from the rear. He fired his last shot, and they fell upon him with his weapon still smoking in his hand.

It required four men to hold him ; the rest of them swarmed about him, vociferating like madmen in their horrible dialect. Françoise rushed forward to intercede with her prayers. They were on the point of killing him on the spot, but an officer came in and made them turn the prisoner over to him. After exchanging a few words in German with his men he turned to Dominique and said to him, in very good French :

" You will be shot in two hours from now."

III

IT was the standing regulations, laid down by the German staff, that every Frenchman, not belonging to the regular army, taken with arms in his hands should be shot. Even the *compagnies franches* were not recognised as belligerents. It was the intention of the Germans, in making such terrible examples, to prevent a rising *en masse*, which they greatly dreaded.

The officer subjected Dominique to a brief examination. Although he spoke French fluently, he was unmistakably Prussian in the stiffness of his manner.

" You are a native of this country ? "

" No, I am a Belgian."

" Why did you take up arms ? These are matters with which you have no concern."

Dominique made no reply. At this moment the officer caught sight of Françoise where she stood listening, very pale ; her slight wound had marked her white forehead with a streak of red. He looked from one to the other of the young people and appeared to understand the situation : he merely added :

" You do not deny having fired on my men ? "

" I fired as long as I was able to do so."

The admission was scarcely necessary, for he was black with powder, wet with sweat, and the blood from the wound in his shoulder had stained his clothing.

" Very well," the officer repeated. " You will be shot two hours hence."

Françoise uttered no cry. She clasped her hands and raised them above her head in a gesture of mute despair. Her action was not lost upon the officer. Two soldiers had led Dominique away to an adjacent room, where their orders were to guard him and not lose sight of him. The girl had sunk upon a chair ; her strength had failed her, her legs refused to support her. The officer continued to examine her attentively, and finally addressed her :

" Is this your brother ? " he inquired.

She shook her head in negation. Then, after an interval of silence, he spoke again :

" Has he been living in the neighbourhood long ? "

She answered yes, by another motion of the head.

" Then he must be well acquainted with the woods about here ? "

This time she made a verbal answer. " Yes, sir," she said, looking at him with some astonishment.

He said nothing more, but turned on his heel, requesting that the mayor of the village should be brought before him. But Françoise had risen from her chair, a faint tinge of colour on her cheeks, believing that she had caught the significance of his questions, and with renewed hope she ran off to look for her father.

As soon as the firing had ceased Father Merlier had hurriedly descended by the wooden gallery to have a look at his wheel. He adored his daughter and had a strong feeling of affection for Dominique, his son-in-law who was to be ; but his wheel also occupied a large space in his heart. Now that the two little ones, as he called them, had come safe and sound out of the fray, he thought of his other love, which must have suffered sorely, poor thing, and bending over the great wooden skeleton he was scrutinising its wounds with a

heart-broken air. Five of the buckets were reduced to splinters, the central framework was honeycombed. He was thrusting his fingers into the cavities that the bullets had made to see how deep they were and reflecting how he was ever to repair all that damage. When Françoise found him he was already plugging up the crevices.

"They are asking for you, father," said she.

And at last she wept as she told him what she had just heard. Father Merlier shook his head. It was not customary to shoot people like that. He would have to look into the matter. And he re-entered the mill with his usual placid, silent air. When the officer made his demand for supplies for his men, he answered that the people of Rocreuse were not accustomed to be ridden roughshod, and that nothing would be obtained from them through violence; he was willing to assume all the responsibility, but only on condition that he was allowed to act independently. The officer at first appeared to take umbrage at this easy way of viewing matters, but finally gave way before the old man's brief and distinct representations. As the latter was leaving the room the other recalled him to ask:

"Those woods there, opposite, what do you call them?"

"The woods of Sauval."

"And how far do they extend?"

The miller looked him straight in the face. "I do not know," he replied.

And he withdrew. An hour later the subvention in money and provisions that the officer had demanded was in the courtyard of the mill. Night was coming on; Françoise followed every movement of the soldiers with an anxious eye. She never once left the vicinity of the room in which Dominique was imprisoned. About seven o'clock she had a harrowing emotion; she saw the officer enter the prisoner's apartment, and for a quarter of an hour heard their voices raised in violent discussion. The officer came to the door for a moment and gave an order in German which she did not understand, but when twelve men came and formed in the courtyard with shouldered muskets, she was seized with a fit of trembling and felt as if she should die. It was all over then; the execution was about to take place. The twelve men remained there ten minutes; Dominique's voice kept rising higher and higher in a tone of vehement denial. Finally the officer came out, saying:

"Very well; think it over. I give you until to-morrow morning."

And he ordered the twelve men to break ranks by a motion of his hand. Françoise was stupefied. Father Merlier took her by the arm with fatherly gentleness. He led her to her chamber.

"Don't fret," he said to her; "try to get some sleep. To-morrow it will be light and we shall see more clearly."

He locked the door behind him as he left the room. It was a fixed principle with him that women are good for nothing, and that they spoil everything whenever they meddle in important matters. Françoise did not lie down, however; she remained a long time seated on her bed, listening to the various noises in the house. The German soldiers quartered in the courtyard were singing and laughing; they must have kept up their eating and drinking until eleven o'clock. Heavy footsteps resounded from time to time through the mill itself, doubtless the tramp of the guards as they were relieved. What had most interest for her was the sounds that she could catch in the room that lay directly under her own; several times she threw herself prone upon the floor and applied her ear to the boards. That room was the one in which they had locked up Dominique. He must have been pacing the apartment, for she could hear for a long time his regular, cadenced tread passing from the wall to the window and back again; then there was a deep silence; doubtless he had seated himself. The other sounds ceased too; everything was still. When it seemed to her that the house was sunk in slumber she raised her window as noiselessly as possible and leaned out.

Without, the night was serene and balmy. The slender crescent of the moon cast a dim radiance over the landscape. But Françoise did not stop to consider the charm of night. She was scrutinising the country and looking to see where the Germans had posted their sentinels. She could clearly distinguish their dark forms outlined along the course of the Morelle. There was only one stationed opposite the mill, on the far bank of the stream, by a willow whose branches dipped in the water. Françoise had an excellent view of him; he was a tall young man, standing

quite motionless with his face upturned towards the sky, with the meditative air of a shepherd.

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WHEN she had completed her careful inspection of localities she returned and took her former seat upon the bed. She remained there an hour, absorbed in deep thought. Then she listened again; there was not a breath to be heard in the house. She went again to the window and took another look outside, but one of the moon's horns was still hanging above the edge of the forest, and this circumstance doubtless appeared to her unpropitious, for she resumed her waiting. At last the moment seemed to have arrived; the night was now quite dark; she could no longer discern the sentinel opposite her, the landscape lay before her black as a sea of ink. She listened intently for a moment, then formed her resolve. Close beside her window was an iron ladder made of bars set in the wall, which ascended from the mill-wheel to the granary at the top of the building, and had formerly served the miller as a means of inspecting certain portions of the gearing, but a change having been made in the machinery the ladder had long since become lost beneath the ivy.

Françoise bravely climbed over the balustrade of the little balcony in front of her window, grasped one of the iron bars and found herself suspended in space. She commenced the descent; her skirts were a great hindrance to her. Suddenly a stone became loosened from the wall and fell into the Morelle with a loud splash. She stopped, benumbed with fear, but reflection quickly told her that the waterfall, with its continuous roar, was sufficient to deaden any noise that she could make, and then she descended more boldly, putting aside the ivy with her foot, testing each round of her ladder. When she was on a level with the room that had been converted into a prison for her lover she stopped. An unforeseen difficulty came near depriving her of all her courage: the window of the room beneath was not situated directly under the window of her bedroom; there was a space between it and the ladder, and when she extended her hand it only encountered the naked wall.

Would she have to go back the way she came and leave her project unaccomplished? Her arms were growing very tired; the murmuring of the Morelle, far down below, was beginning to make her dizzy. Then she broke off bits of plaster from the wall and threw them against Dominique's window. He did not hear; perhaps he was asleep. Again she crumbled fragments from the wall, until the skin was peeled from her fingers. Her strength was exhausted; she felt that she was about to fall back into the stream when at last Dominique softly raised his sash.

"It is I," she murmured. "Take me quick; I am about to fall." Leaning from the window he grasped her and drew her into the room, where she had a paroxysm of weeping, stifling her sobs in order that she might not be heard. Then, by a supreme effort of the will she overcame her emotion.

"Are you guarded?" she asked in a low voice.

Dominique, not yet recovered from his stupefaction at seeing her there, made answer by simply pointing toward his door. There was a sound of snoring audible on the outside; it was evident that the sentinel had been overpowered by sleep and had thrown himself upon the floor close against the door in such a way that it could not be opened without arousing him.

"You must fly," she continued earnestly. "I came to bid you fly and say farewell."

But he seemed not to hear her. He kept repeating:

"What, is it you, is it you? Oh, what a fright you gave me! You might have killed yourself." He took her hands, he kissed them again and again. "How I love you, Françoise! You are as courageous as you are good. The only thing I feared was that I might die without seeing you again; but you are here, and now they may shoot me when they will. Let me but have a quarter of an hour with you and I am ready."

He had gradually drawn her to him; her head was resting on his shoulder.

"Ah, Françoise!" Dominique went on in low, caressing tones, "to-day is the fête of St. Louis, our wedding day, that we have been waiting for so long. Nothing has been able to keep us apart, for we are both here, faithful to our appointment. It is now our wedding morning."

"Yes, yes," she repeated after him, "our wedding morning."

They shuddered as they exchanged a kiss. But suddenly she tore herself from

his arms; the terrible reality arose before her eyes.

"You must fly, you must fly," she murmured breathlessly. "There is not a moment to lose." And as he stretched out his arms in the darkness to draw her to him again, she went on in tender, beseeching tones: "Oh! listen to me, I entreat you. If you die, I shall die. In an hour it will be daylight. Go, go at once; I command you to go."

Then she rapidly explained her plan to him. The iron ladder extended downward to the wheel; once he had got so far he could climb down by means of the buckets and get into the boat, which was hidden in a recess. Then it would be an easy matter for him to reach the other bank of the stream and make his escape.

"But are there no sentinels?" said he.

"Only one, directly opposite here, at the foot of the first willow."

"And if he sees me, if he gives the alarm?"

Françoise shuddered. She placed in his hand a knife that she had brought down with her. They were silent.

"And your father—and you?" Dominique continued. "But no, it is not to be thought of; I must not fly. When I am no longer here those soldiers are capable of murdering you. You do not know them. They offered to spare my life if I would guide them into Sauval forest. When they discover that I have escaped they will be ready for every atrocity."

The girl did not stop to argue the question. To all the considerations that he adduced to her one simple answer was: "Fly. If you love me, Dominique, do not linger here a single moment longer."

She promised that she would return to her bedroom; no one should know that she had helped him. She concluded by folding him in her arms and smothering him with kisses, in an extravagant outburst of passion. He was vanquished. He only put one more question to her:

"Will you swear to me that your father knows what you are doing, and that he counsels my flight?"

"It was my father who sent me to you," Françoise unhesitatingly replied.

She told a falsehood. At that moment she had but one great, overmastering longing, to know that he was in safety, to escape from the horrible thought that the morning's sun was to be the signal for his death. When he should be far away, then calamity and evil might burst upon her head; whatever fate might be in store for her would seem endurable, so that only his life might be spared. Before and above all other considerations, the selfishness of her love demanded that he should be saved.

"It is well," said Dominique; "I will do as you desire."

No further word was spoken. Dominique went to the window to raise it again. But suddenly there was a noise that chilled them with affright. The door was shaken violently; they thought that someone was about to open it; it was evidently a party going the rounds who had heard their voices. They stood by the window, closely locked in each other's arms, awaiting the event with anguish unspeakable. Again there came the rattling at the door, but it did not open. Each of them drew a deep sigh of relief; they saw how it was. The soldier lying across the threshold had turned over in his sleep. Silence was restored.

Dominique insisted that Françoise should return to her room first of all. He took her in his arms, he bade her a silent farewell, then helped her to grasp the ladder, and himself climbed out on it in turn. He refused to descend a single step, however, until he knew that she was in her chamber. When she was safe in her room she let fall in a voice scarce louder than a whisper, the words:

"*Au revoir.* I love you!"

She kneeled at the window, resting her elbows on the sill, straining her eyes to follow Dominique. The night was still very dark. She looked for the sentinel, but could see nothing of him; the willow alone was dimly visible, a pale spot upon the surrounding blackness. For a moment she heard the rustling of the ivy as Dominique descended, then the wheel creaked, and there was a faint splash which told that the young man had found the boat. This was confirmed when, a minute later, she descried the shadowy outline of the skiff on the grey bosom of the Morelle. Then a horrible feeling of dread seemed to clutch her by the throat. Every moment she thought she heard the sentry give the alarm; every faintest sound among the dusky shadows seemed to her overwrought imagination to be the hurrying

(*Continued on page 144*)

BEECHAM'S PILLS

A World Wonder

tread of soldiers, the clash of steel, the click of musket-locks. The seconds slipped by, however, the landscape still preserved its solemn peace. Dominique must have landed safely on the other bank. Françoise no longer had eyes for anything. The silence was oppressive. And she heard the sound of trampling feet, a hoarse cry, the dull thud of a heavy body falling. This was followed by another silence, even deeper than that which had gone before. Then, as if conscious that Death had passed that way, she became very cold in presence of the impenetrable night.

IV

AT early daybreak the repose of the mill was disturbed by the clamour of angry voices. Father Merlier had gone and unlocked Françoise's door. She descended to the courtyard, pale and very calm, but when there, could not repress a shudder upon being brought face to face with the body of a Prussian soldier that lay beside the well, stretched out upon a cloak.

Around the corpse soldiers were shouting and gesticulating angrily. Several of them shook their fists threateningly in the direction of the village. The officer had just sent a summons to Father Merlier to appear before him in his capacity as mayor of the commune.

"Here is one of our men," he said, in a voice that was almost unintelligible from anger, "who was found murdered on the bank of the stream. The murderer must be found, so that we may make a salutary example of him, and I shall expect you to co-operate with us in finding him."

"Whatever you desire," the miller replied, with his customary impassiveness. "Only it will be no easy matter."

The officer stooped down and drew aside the skirt of the cloak which concealed the dead man's face, disclosing as he did so a frightful wound. The sentinel had been struck in the throat and the weapon had not been withdrawn from the wound. It was a common kitchen-knife, with a black handle.

"Look at that knife," the officer said. "Perhaps it will assist in our investigation."

The old man had started violently, but not a muscle of his face moved as he replied:

"Every one about here has knives like that. Like enough your man was tired of fighting and did the business himself."

"Be silent!" the officer shouted in a fury. "I don't know what it is that keeps me from setting fire to your village."

His anger fortunately kept him from noticing the great change that had come over Françoise's countenance. Do what she would she could not remove her eyes from the body that lay stretched upon the ground, almost at her feet. He had been a tall, handsome young man in life, very like Dominique in appearance, with blue eyes and yellow hair. The resemblance went to her heart. She thought that perhaps the dead man had left behind him in his German home some sweetheart who would weep for his loss. And she recognised her knife in the dead man's throat. She had killed him.

The officer, meantime, was talking of visiting Rocreuse with some terrible punishment, when two or three soldiers came running in. The guard had just that moment ascertained the fact of Dominique's escape. The agitation caused by the tidings was extreme. The officer went to inspect the locality, saw at once how the event had happened, and returned in a state of exasperation.

Father Merlier appeared greatly vexed by Dominique's flight. "The idiot!" he murmured; "he has upset everything."

Françoise heard him, and was in an agony of suffering. Her father, moreover, had no suspicion of her complicity. He shook his head, saying to her in an undertone:

"We are in a nice box now!"

"It was that scoundrel!" cried the officer. "He has got away to the woods; but he must be found, or the village shall stand the consequences." And addressing himself to the miller: "Come, you must know where he is hiding?"

Father Merlier laughing in his silent way, pointed to the wide stretch of wooded hills.

"How can you expect to find a man in that wilderness?" he asked.

"Oh! there are plenty of hiding-places that you are acquainted with. I am going to give you ten men; you shall act as guide to them."

"I am perfectly willing. But it will take a week to beat up all the woods of the neighbourhood."

The old man's serenity enraged the officer; he saw, indeed, what a ridiculous proceeding such a hunt would be. It was at that moment that he caught sight of

(*Continued on page* 146.)

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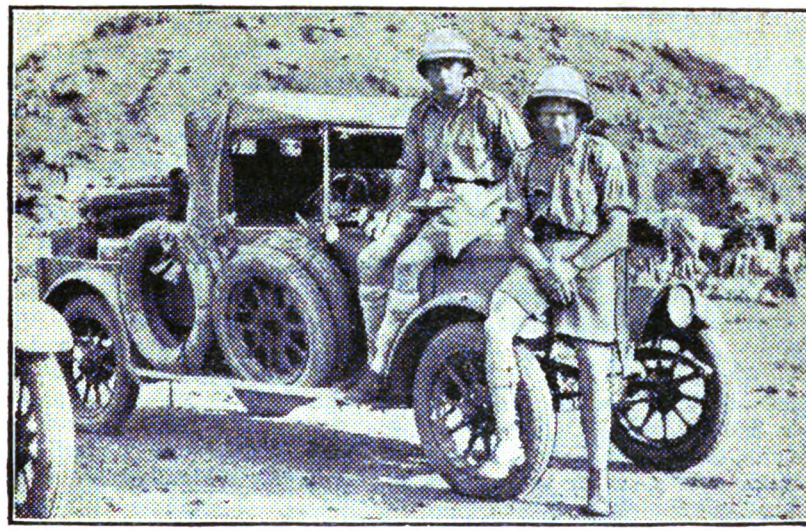

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Françoise where she sat, pale and trembling, on her bench. His attention was aroused by the girl's anxious attitude. He was silent for a moment, glancing suspiciously from father to daughter and back again.

"Is not that man," he at last asked the old man, "your daughter's lover?"

Father Merlier's face became ashy pale, and he appeared for a moment as if about to throw himself on the officer and throttle him. He straightened himself up and made no reply. Françoise had hid her face in her hands.

"Yes, that is how it is," the Prussian continued; "you or your daughter have helped him to escape. For the last time, will you surrender him?"

The miller did not answer. He had turned away and was looking at the distant landscape with an air of indifference, just as if the officer were talking to some other person. That put the finishing touch on the latter's wrath.

"Very well, then!" he declared, "you shall be shot in his stead."

And again he ordered out the firing party. Father Merlier was as imperturbable as ever. He scarcely did so much as shrug his shoulders; the whole drama appeared to him to be in very doubtful taste. He probably believed that they would not take a man's life in that unceremonious manner. When the platoon was on the ground he gravely said:

"So, then, you are in earnest? Very well, I am willing it should be so. If you must have a victim, it may as well be I."

But Françoise arose, greatly troubled, stammering: "Have mercy, sir; do not harm my father. Kill me instead of him. It was I who helped Dominique to escape."

"Hold your tongue, my girl," Father Merlier exclaimed. "Why do you tell such a falsehood? She passed the night locked in her room, sir; I assure you that she does not speak the truth."

"I *am* speaking the truth," the girl eagerly replied. "I got down by the window; I incited Dominique to fly."

The old man's face was very white. He could read in her eyes that she was not lying, and her story terrified him. Ah, those children! those children! how they spoiled everything, with their hearts and their feelings! Then he said angrily:

"She is crazy; do not listen to her. Come, let us get through this business."

She persisted on her protestations; she kneeled, she raised her clasped hands in supplication. The officer stood tranquilly by and watched the harrowing scene.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he said at last, "I take your father because the other has escaped me. Bring me back the other man, and your father shall have his liberty."

She looked at him for a moment with eyes dilated by the horror which his proposal inspired in her.

"It is dreadful," she murmured. "Where can I look for Dominique now? He is gone; I know nothing beyond that."

"Well, make your choice between them; him or your father."

"Oh, my God! how can I choose? Even if I knew where to find Dominique I could not choose. You are breaking my heart. I would rather die at once. Kill me, I beseech you, kill me——"

The officer became weary. He cried:

"Enough of this! I wish to treat you kindly; I will give you two hours. If your lover is not here within two hours, your father shall pay the penalty."

And he ordered Father Merlier away to the room that had served as a prison for Dominique. The old man asked for tobacco, and began to smoke. There was no trace of emotion to be described on his impassive face. Only when he was alone he wept. His poor, dear child, what a fearful trial she was enduring!

Françoise remained in the courtyard. Prussian soldiers passed back and forth, laughing. Some of them addressed her with coarse pleasantries which she did not understand. Her gaze was bent upon the door through which her father had disappeared, and with a slow movement she raised her hand to her forehead, as if to keep it from bursting. The officer turned sharply on his heel, and said to her:

"You have two hours. Try to make good use of them."

She had two hours. The words kept buzzing, buzzing in her ears. Then she went forth mechanically from the courtyard; she walked straight ahead with no definite end. Where was she to go? What was she to do? She did not even endeavour to arrive at any decision, for she felt how utterly useless were her efforts. And yet she would have liked to see Dominique; they could have come to some understanding together. And so, amid the confusion of her whirling thoughts, she took

(*Continued on page 148*)

The DANGER *of* LOWERED VITALITY

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P. 394

her way downward to the bank of the Morelle, which she crossed below the dam by means of some stepping-stones which were there. Proceeding onward, still involuntarily, she came to the first willow, at the corner of the meadow, and stooping down, beheld a sight that made her grow deathly pale—a pool of blood. It was the spot. And she followed the track that Dominique had left in the tall grass; it was evident that he had run, for the footsteps that crossed the meadow in a diagonal line were separated from one another by wide intervals. Then, beyond that point, she lost trace, but thought she had discovered it again in an adjoining field. It led her to the border of the forest, where the trail came abruptly to an end.

Though conscious of the futility of the proceeding, Françoise penetrated into the wood. She sat down for a moment, then, reflecting that time was passing, rose again to her feet. How long was it since she left the mill? Five minutes, or a half-hour? She had lost all idea of time. Perhaps Dominique had sought concealment in a clearing that she knew of, where they had gone together one afternoon and eaten hazel-nuts. She directed her step toward the clearing; she searched it thoroughly. A blackbird flew out, whistling his sweet and melancholy note; that was all. Then she thought that he might have taken refuge in a hollow among the rocks where he went sometimes with his gun, but the spot was untenanted. What use was there in looking for him? She would never find him, and little by little the desire to discover the hiding place became a passionate longing. The idea suddenly took possession of her that he had climbed into a tree, and thenceforth she went along with eyes raised aloft and called him by name every fifteen or twenty steps, so that he might know she was near him. The cuckoos answered her; a breath of air that rustled the leaves made her think that he was there and was coming down to her. Once she even imagined that she saw him; she stopped with a sense of suffocation, with a desire to run away. What was she to say to him? Had she come there to take him back with her and have him shot? Oh! no, she would not mention those things; she would not tell him that he must fly, that he must not remain in the neighbourhood. Then she thought of her father awaiting her return. She sank upon the turf, weeping hot tears, crying aloud:

"My God! My God! Why am I here?"

It was a mad thing for her to have come. And as if seized with sudden panic, she ran hither and thither. She sought to make her way out of the forest. Three times she lost her way, and had begun to think she was never to see the mill again, when she came out into a meadow, directly opposite Rocreuse. As soon as she caught sight of the village she stopped. Was she going to return alone?

She was standing there when she heard a voice calling her by name, softly:

"Françoise! Françoise!"

And she beheld Dominique raising his head above the edge of a ditch. Just God! she had found him.

Could it be, then, that Heaven willed his death? She suppressed a cry and slipped into the ditch beside him.

"You were looking for me!" he asked.

"Yes," she replied bewilderedly.

"Ah! what has happened?"

She stammered, with eyes downcast: "Why, nothing; I was anxious, I wanted to see you."

Thereupon, his fears alleviated, he went on to tell her how it was that he had remained in the vicinity. He was alarmed for them. Those rascally Prussians were not wreaking their vengeance on women and old men. All had ended well, however, and he added, laughing:

"The wedding will be put off for a week, that's all."

He became serious, however, upon noticing that her dejection did not pass away.

"But what is the matter? You are concealing something from me."

"No, I give you my word I am not. I am tired; I ran all the way here."

He kissed her, saying it was imprudent for them both to talk there any longer, and was about to climb out of the ditch in order to return to the forest. She stopped him; she was trembling violently.

"Listen, Dominique; perhaps it will be as well for you to stay here, after all. You have nothing to fear."

"Françoise, you are concealing something from me," he said again.

Again she protested that she was concealing nothing. She only liked to know that he was near her. And there were

(*Continued on page 150*)

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other reasons still that she gave in stammering accents. Her manner was so strange that no consideration could now have induced him to go away. He believed moreover, that the French would return presently. Troops had been seen over towards Sauval.

"Ah! let them come as quickly as possible," she murmured fervently.

At that moment the clock of the church at Rocreuse struck eleven; the strokes reached them, clear and distinct. She arose in terror; it was two hours since she had left the mill.

"Listen," she said, with feverish rapidity, "should we need you, I will go up to my room and wave from the window."

And she started off homeward on a run, while Dominique, greatly disturbed in mind, stretched himself at length beside the ditch to watch the mill. Just as she was about to enter the village Françoise encountered an old beggar man, Father Bontemps, who knew every one and everything in that part of the country. He saluted her; he had just seen the miller, he said, surrounded by a crowd of Prussians; then, making signs of the Cross and mumbling inarticulately, he went his way.

"The two hours are up," the officer said when Françoise made her appearance.

Father Merlier was there, seated on the bench beside the well. He was smoking still. The young girl again proffered her supplication, kneeling before the officer and weeping. Her wish was to gain time. The hope that she might yet behold the return of the French had been gaining strength in her bosom, and amid her tears and sobs she thought she could distinguish in the distance the cadenced tramp of an advancing army. Oh! if they would but deliver them all from their fearful trouble!

"Hear me, sir; grant us an hour, just one little hour!"

But the officer was inflexible. He even ordered two men to lay hold of her and take her away, in order that they might proceed undisturbed with the execution of the old man. Then a dreadful conflict took place in Françoise's heart. She could not allow her father to be murdered in that manner; no, no, she would die in company with Dominique rather; and she was just darting away in the direction of her room in order to signal to her *fiancé*, when Dominique entered the courtyard.

The officer and his soldiers gave a great shout of triumph, but he, as if there had been no soul there but Françoise, walked straight up to her; he was perfectly calm, and his expression wore a slight expression of sternness.

"You did wrong," he said. "Why did you not bring me back with you? Had it not been for Father Bontemps I should have known nothing of all this. Well, I am here, at all events."

V

IT was three o'clock. The heavens were piled high with great black clouds, the tail-end of a storm that had been raging somewhere in the vicinity. Beneath the coppery sky and ragged scud the valley of Rocreuse, so bright and smiling in the sunlight, became a grim chasm, full of sinister shadows. The Prussian officer had done nothing with Dominique beyond placing him in confinement, giving no indication of his ultimate purpose in regard to him. Françoise, since noon, had been suffering unendurable agony; notwithstanding her father's entreaties, she would not leave the courtyard. She was waiting for the French troops to appear, but the hours slipped by, night was approaching, and she suffered all the more since it appeared as if the time thus gained would have no effect on the final result.

About three o'clock, however, the Prussians began to make their preparations for departure. The officer had gone to Dominique's room and remained closeted with him for some minutes, as he had done the day before. Françoise knew that the young man's life was hanging in the balance; she clasped her hands and put up fervent prayers. Beside her sat Father Merlier, rigid and silent, declining, like the true peasant he was, to attempt any interference with accomplished facts.

"Oh! my God! my God!" Françoise exclaimed, "they are going to kill him!"

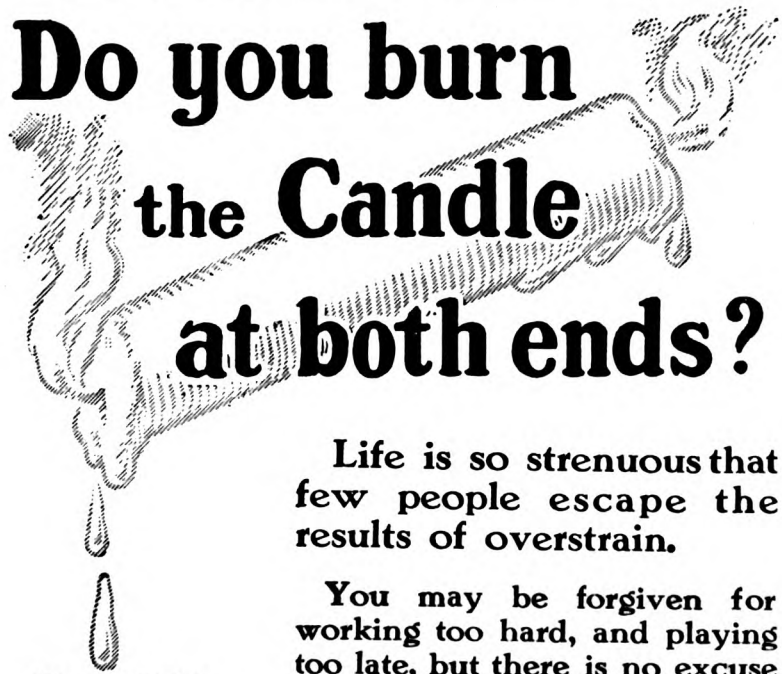
The miller drew her to him, and took her on his lap as if she had been a little child. At this juncture the officer came from the room, followed by two men conducting Dominique between them.

"Never, never!" the latter exclaimed "I am ready to die."

"You had better think the matter over," the officer replied. "I shall have no trouble in finding some one else to render us the service which you refuse. I am

(*Continued on page 152*)

Do you burn the Candle at both ends?



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generous with you ; I offer you your life. It is simply a matter of guiding us across the forest to Montredon ; there must be paths."

Dominique made no answer.

" Then you persist in your obstinacy ? "

" Shoot me, and let's have done with it," he replied.

Françoise, in the distance, entreated her lover with clasped hands ; she was forgetful of all considerations save one—she would have had him commit a treason. But Father Merlier seized her hands, that the Prussians might not see the wild gestures of a woman whose mind was disordered by her distress.

" He is right," he murmured, " it is best for him to die."

The firing-party was in readiness. The officer still had hopes of bringing Dominique over, and was waiting to see him exhibit some signs of weakness, when suddenly the cry arose :

" The French ; the French ! "

It was a fact ; they were coming. The line of red trousers could be seen advancing along the Sauval road, at the edge of the forest. In the mill the confusion was extreme. Not a shot had been fired as yet.

" The French ! the French ! " cried Françoise, clapping her hands for joy. She was like a woman possessed. She had escaped from her father's embrace and was laughing boisterously, her arms raised high in the air. They had come at last, then, and had come in time, since Dominique was still there, alive !

A crash of musketry that rang in her ears like a thunderclap caused her suddenly to turn her head. The officer had muttered, " We will finish this business first," and with his own hands pushing Dominique up against the wall of a shed, had given the command to the squad to fire. When Françoise turned, Dominique was lying on the ground, pierced by a dozen bullets.

She did not shed a tear ; she stood there like one suddenly rendered senseless. Her eyes were fixed and staring, and she went and seated herself beneath the shed, a few steps from the lifeless body. She looked at it wistfully ; now and then she would make a movement with her hands in an aimless, childish way. The Prussians had seized Father Merlier as a hostage.

They were now the defenders of the mill, and the French were the attacking party. The musketry fire began with unparalleled fury ; for half an hour there was no lull in the storm. Then a deep report was heard, and a ball carried away a main branch of the old elm. The French had artillery ; a battery, in position just beyond the ditch where Dominique had concealed himself, commanded the main street of Rocreuse.

Ah ! the poor old mill ! The cannon-balls raked it from wall to wall. Half the roof was carried away ; two of the walls fell in. The ivy, torn from the tottering walls, hung in tatters, débris of every description floated away upon the bosom of the stream, and through a great breach Françoise's chamber was visible, with its little bed, the snow-white curtains of which were carefully drawn. Two balls struck the old wheel in quick succession, and it gave one parting groan ; the buckets were carried away down stream, the frame was crushed into a shapeless mass.

Then the French came forward to carry the place by storm. There was a mad hand-to-hand conflict with the bayonet. Under the dull sky the pretty valley became a huge slaughter-pen ; while to right and left the forest was like the walls of a tilting-ground enclosing the combatants.

Françoise had not stirred from the shed where she remained hanging over Dominique's body. Father Merlier had met his death from a stray bullet. Then the French captain, the Prussians being exterminated and the mill on fire, entered the courtyard at the head of his men. It was the first success that he had gained since the breaking out of the war, so, all inflamed with enthusiasm, drawing himself up to the full height of his lofty stature, he laughed pleasantly, as a handsome cavalier like him might laugh. Then, perceiving poor idiotic Françoise where she crouched between the corpses of her father and her intended, among the smoking ruins of the mill, he saluted her gallantly with his sword, and shouted :

" Victory ! Victory ! "

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THE ARGOSY

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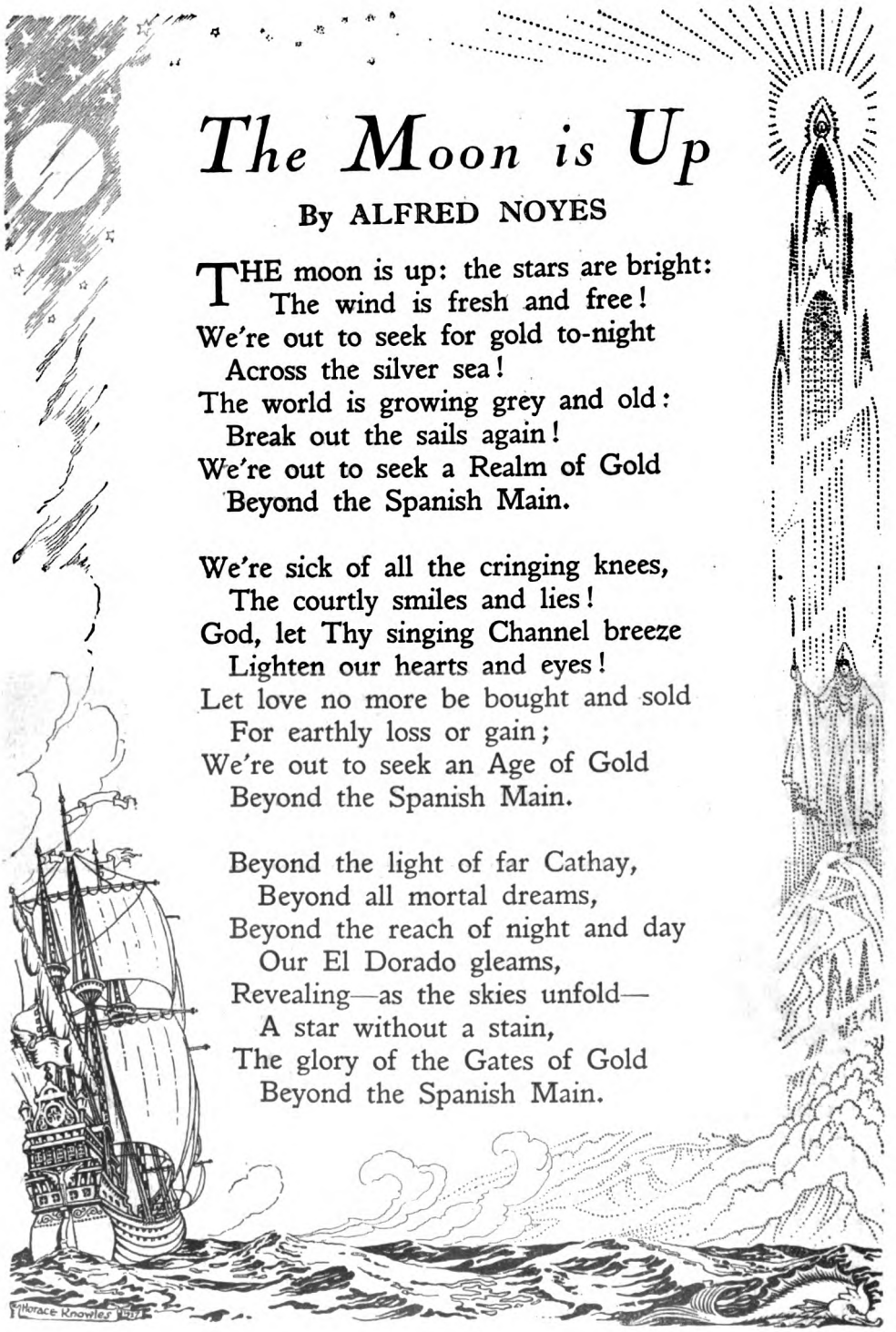

The Moon is Up

By ALFRED NOYES

THE moon is up: the stars are bright:
The wind is fresh and free!
We're out to seek for gold to-night
Across the silver sea!
The world is growing grey and old:
Break out the sails again!
We're out to seek a Realm of Gold
Beyond the Spanish Main.

We're sick of all the cringing knees,
The courtly smiles and lies!
God, let Thy singing Channel breeze
Lighten our hearts and eyes!
Let love no more be bought and sold
For earthly loss or gain;
We're out to seek an Age of Gold
Beyond the Spanish Main.

Beyond the light of far Cathay,
Beyond all mortal dreams,
Beyond the reach of night and day
Our El Dorado gleams,
Revealing—as the skies unfold—
A star without a stain,
The glory of the Gates of Gold
Beyond the Spanish Main.

The ARGOSY
The WORLD'S BEST STORIES

Vol. 1.—No. 11. APRIL, 1927

Darkness

Of two who met for judgment

By MAX BRAND

EVEN the wind was familiar to Jeremy Keever, for September in the old town was inseparably connected, in his mind, with variable gales such as the one that now fitted comfortably under his shoulders and helped him down the street. It changed with irritating suddenness, now cuffing him from the side, now flattening his hat-brim across his eyes, but chiefly it hung in the west, bearing distinct volleys of rain that rattled through the trees as though the foliage were paper. Keever stepped into the shelter of the great elm at the corner of Elmtree Road and turned up the frayed collar of his overcoat rather against the increasing chill than the wetness. Before he issued from this shelter he lighted a cigarette, despite the air currents, with the deftness of a sailor. An afterthought made him turn, and though the flame was blown ragged, it showed him what he wanted: a deep-sunk, blackened pair of initials—J.K.

He was still gazing when the match burned his fingers. Then Keever turned again down the walk. It had been a natural pathway in the old days, but now a loose coating of gravel made it good footing. The road itself was changed, for whereas Keever remembered it winding loosely, unhurried, between the rows of elms, it was now broad and straight with yellow window-lights streaking the wet macadam.

Perhaps it was the straightness of the way that made the distance seem shorter, but Keever was astonished by the speed with which he reached the old house. This, at least, was unaltered by time. The hedge which had barely reached his shoulder now rose an untrimmed height above his head; indeed, it was rather a closely-packed line of little fir-trees than a true hedge. Keever stared at it with disproportionate astonishment, but surely Henry Gandil was not the man to let a place run down in this fashion. Then he shrank with the fear that, after all his journey, Gandil might not be here; he might be dead, he might have moved. After the fashion of one who is bewildered, Keever's glance wandered over the dimly glistening roofs of the town until it reached that grouping of pointed summits—the Cloisters. Seeing the old hills he was strangely reassured that Gandil must be here—in this house, the very same Gandil, with that bony figure and the incredible hands.

Nevertheless, he decided to explore a little before he knocked at the door. The hole at the corner of the hedge was now a great gap; he ducked through it, lightening his footfall in expectation of the soft garden-loam. But his heel struck hardened earth. He thought at first that he must have come into one of the random paths of the garden, but trying the surface tentatively on either side he found the same packed, uncultivated ground. Was this the husbandry of Henry Gandil? To be sure, he was prepared to find vegetables replacing the rose, but the Gandil he knew could never have allowed this fertile patch

to become barren. His dismay increased when he looked at the house itself. Sufficient illumination came from across the street to set the windows glinting, but that accented their blackness. Only behind the French doors which opened from the veranda into the library there was a mist of lamplight. Lamplight, when all the rest of the town glittered with electricity!

At this point the wind stopped his thoughts. It jumped out of the north and buffeted against the house with a spattering of rain. The French doors, which had been pried at before, no doubt, now banged open; in the room the light soared, puffed out, and Keever heard a crash of glass. Then the wind veered serenely to the west, and Keever heard a man's voice exclaim from the darkness of the room. The sound roused in him one of those impulses which had directed him so often and so unthinkingly in the past. A few strides brought him on to the veranda, then one long step and he was in the room. He reached a long arm on either side of him and closed the doors. He stood, now, committed to a course, and before he left the place he would have the old grudge against Gandil out—if the man still lived there. The thought of action made him fiercely happy, but in the meantime he must make some explanation.

"I was passing," he said. "Saw the doors knocked open and heard the lamp burst. Any further damage done?"

In the accusing little silence that followed he regretted that speech, for obviously no one could look over the hedge from the pavement to these doors. The wind had been closed out, but still it filled the room with whispering, hushing sounds, and Keever, in spite of his bulk, felt an uneasy quickening of his heart-beat. The library was made shadowy, rather than lighted, by the darkening coals in the fireplace, so that as he peered earnestly about him he made out suggestions but no real forms. The pause lasted so long that he made up his mind the man must have left the room to get another lamp; and then a voice spoke. Keever thought it the oldest voice he had ever heard. There was no tremor, but it held that chill of age, and the words came flatly out, one by one.

"No great amount of harm. The lamp was out before it smashed on the floor, luckily. That is all."

He paused here, unquestioning, as though this mischief of the wind and the entry of the stranger were small events indeed. The few moments had enabled Keever to see—nothing clearly, but with a baffling indistinctness that was almost as bad as utter dark. Yet he made out part of the bulk of the table, the dreamy outline of the man who sat beyond it, and above all the dimmest of dim highlights on a bald head. The heart of Keever sank, for above all things he recalled the dense uncombed masses of Gandil's hair. Certainly this was not his man, and in his embarrassment he began to stammer.

"Here—I've got a match. Shall I light it and——"

"There isn't much use lighting it," said the other. "The lamp is broken, you know."

"But maybe you have a candle?"

"I think not."

"Well, another lamp, then?"

"I don't know. But I'm afraid this is really the last lamp in the house that's in working order."

He was entirely calm about it; Keever was supplying all the feeling of excitement, and now he hunted eagerly for some explanation. These silences threw the burden of proof entirely on him, as it were, but one fact hindered his ideas as he strove to arrange them for speech. No lamp in the house—not even a candle! That was in itself a light, showing the wretched poverty in which this man lived, and all the stern emptiness of the room. These reflections must have occupied him longer than he imagined, for presently the voice among the shadows said: "Sir, I fear you have come here for no good purpose. Are you stealing towards me now?"

The weary fibre of the voice had not changed, but it was the speech of a man in fear. Because he could see and remain unseen Keever had a sense of omniscience. Suppose he had come there for an evil purpose, how utterly the life of the stranger was in his hand. The old fellow seemed to realise it, for no matter what his fear, he had made no motion to attempt an escape, or even to rise. Pity came warmly into the heart of Keever, an emotion so rare with him that he found it oddly sweet. He wanted to protect this derelict, find out who was guilty of leaving him unsustained in his old age. He even made a step forward, the uncarpeted boards of the floor creaking beneath him.

"I—as a matter of fact——" he said.

" My friend, there is nothing in the house worth taking, and whoever directed you here played a very sad joke on you. The whole town could tell you that."

" Hang it ! " growled Keever, " I'm not aiming to clean out the place. I'm just—you see, I'm looking for a man who used to live here."

" Who is he ? "

Keever was acutely grateful because his extraordinary mode of entry was not thrown in his face at this point. Then he thought of Gandil and forgot all gentleness.

" Gandil," he said heavily. " Henry Gandil is his name."

" Henry Gandil ? " repeated the other, so absently, so gently that Keever felt he had been roaring like a bully. He hastened to explain : " I used to live in this house before Gandil came in. My name's Keever. And if you can tell me where to find Gandil, I'll take it kindly of you."

" The man you hunt for is dead, Mr. Keever."

¶

KEEVER reached out for a support, found the back of a chair, and lowered himself into it.

" Dead ? " repeated Keever. " Dead ? "

His voice swelled with a great bitterness. " I might have known I'd wait too long. But how could he have died ? How could a mountain of a man like Gandil have died ? " He leaned eagerly. " Tell me all about how he died. Let's hear the whole story ! "

" In great pain, Mr. Keever. In a great and wasting agony."

The hard palms of Keever rasped together, and as he nodded his body swayed a little so that the chair creaked under his great weight.

" I'm glad of that," he said at length. " I'm glad of that—curse him ! "

He added hastily : " But maybe you're related to him, or something ? " And he gazed eagerly at the other : the face was impenetrable shadow.

" In a way," said the old man, " I am his heir."

" He gave you this house, eh ? Well, I want nothing out of the Gandil brood—not even directions for finding him. I'll be getting along."

" Wait," said the other, " you mustn't take me for granted ; if I am a relation of Gandil, at least I have no affection for him."

From the act of rising, Keever settled back into his place.

" Gandil's done you some dirty trick," he interpreted. " That's it. Robbed you of a big pile, and then gives you this tumble-down show so's you'll pray for him. But you'll never pray Gandil out of his corner of hell ! "

He could see the head of the old man bow, as though he were considering this remark. Then : " I suppose not," he said. " A life of prayer would never redeem the lost soul of Henry Gandil. As a matter of fact, he himself said so."

" He did ? " gasped Keever. He pondered on this, and detesting problems, he was rejoiced when the solution came to him. " I see that, too ; and it's part of the pattern of a cur like Gandil. When he was just ready to fade out he got scared of death and started a lot of sobbing about himself. Don't it get over you the way these hard ones crack before they snuff out ? " He went on, rather to himself : " So he whined, did he ? I'd like to have seen that ! I'd like to have heard that ! "

" To tell you the truth," said the other, " I waste little time on the memory of that man, but I spend a great deal of energy trying to banish all recollection of him from the face of the earth."

" You do ? That's the way you feel. My friend, that's as much to me as if we'd shook hands and shoved our feet under the same table and had a drink together ! You hate him as much as that ? Well, but I could tell you a story ! "

" By all means do ! " The voice lost its flatness and took on a sympathy that astonished Keever. It affected him like the smiling eyes of a woman, and made him want to talk of all that was good in his nature. " By all means tell me about yourself, Mr. Keever. I'm very interested."

That crying need to talk of himself swelled in Keever. But the last time he had told the true story the girl had informed the police. The memory hardened him again.

" And why the dickens should you be interested ? " he asked.

" Because I've seen enough to take my fancy."

" And you sitting in the dark ! "

" There you have me ! " The old man laughed a little, very softly. " But, you see, I was sitting here over my book with the

smell of paraffin from that badly-trimmed lamp, and then the wind knocked the windows open and you came in with the good, fresh, honest smell of the rain and the wet ground and the trees. The strength of your step made the floor quiver, and then you spoke with a big, young voice. Altogether, I think I could paint a picture of you without ever having seen your face."

"H-m-m!" said Keever. "P'r'aps you could. I've seen queer things done, but never bumped into a gent before that could see in the dark."

"But you yourself have seen in the dark, Mr. Keever. The stars, you know. Am I right?"

"Here, are you getting at me?" said Keever dangerously. For he was an explosive speaker, and his life had given him two dominant notes alone in all the rich scale of the human voice—indifference and violent anger. But the other seemed to take no offence.

"An old man leads a selfish life, you know," he said. "He shuts himself up in his thoughts, in his work. I have given a good many years to studying men and their needs and in trying to help them in a very modest way when I find that I can be of use. But very often I find that there is too much light for me to see my problem. I see so much that I see nothing. I am embarrassed by the details, and it is seldom—ah, very seldom, that I can come at the truth of men as children do—with one grasp of the mind. I see too much of the faces of men in spite of all my efforts, and too little of their souls. But now and then the great insight comes, and I feel that I know that man or the woman or the child before me. And that, Keever, is a tremendous thing; a sad and joyous and awful thing!"

Keever shook his massive head.

"That's pretty heavy stuff for me, and what it's got to do with me coming into your house I can't see."

"Because since you entered this room, although I have not looked into your face, I think I know you."

Keever chuckled. "Well, there's a good deal to know. Suppose you tell me how you've summed me up." He settled ponderously back in his chair. There is nothing to which a man will listen so willingly as talk about himself. Keever grinned. "I don't ask you to tell me a lot of facts, but just hit off a few of the chief stunts. If you get the headlines right, I'll say you're a wizard. I've had mind-readers do funny things by me, but never a bird that worked in the dark."

He laughed aloud, and then waited. There was a faint whisper of cloth as the man behind the table leaned forward and Jeremy Keever could feel the glance that searched for him. His own eyes wandered to the dull orange of the coals that were dying on the hearth, and then came back suddenly, defensively, and erected a barrier against the man behind the table.

"I believe," said the voice, "that it will be easy to sum up your character—you are a man of violence."

"Ah!" said Keever, "I'm big. I talk loud. Anybody could guess I'm not exactly soft-handed. Get down to facts."

"I don't think you'd be glad to hear the facts about yourself."

"Look here!" cried Jeremy. "D'you know me?" He added: "Go ahead. I'll take the chance. And I'll tell you if you're hot or cold."

"You are a dominant man," said the other. "I think you have had your way with other men."

"I've had my bad times," chuckled Keever, "but never from one man. And them that mobbed me have been sorry for it later on!"

"And have you, Keever, never regretted what you have done to other men—in violence?"

Jeremy felt that he was being pushed away to a distance so that he could be viewed coldly, impersonally. And he winced. It was like being thrust off by the left hand of a fighter who wanted to strike with the right. Instinctively he leaned forward and tightened his muscles.

"What do you mean—regret? I've given everyone a square deal. I take no advantages. Never fought foul in my life!"

The other paused. There was a certain deadliness in these moments of waiting. Keever liked to have the blows come thick and fast—and strike back in the same manner.

"There is a kind of fighting that is always foul," said the old man.

"Eh?" grunted Keever. "What's that?"

"How much of the Bible have you read?"

"Look here, old man, cut out the church stuff, will you?" He added, curiously: "What part of the Bible d'you mean?"

"The story of Cain."

Jeremy was stunned. But he managed to struggle to his feet. "You tell your dreams to yourself," he said. "I'll take the air for mine."

He strode across the room, but at the door he wheeled, mastered by his anger, and came back, close to the table, and leaned above his host. The latter did not wince. He raised his face and Keever was maddened to find that even at this close range he could make nothing of the features. He smashed his great fist on the table.

"What in blazes did you mean by that?"

"This, Keever, that you came to this house to-night to do a murder."

The heat melted from the brain of Keever. He moved back from the table slowly, hardly knowing what he did, and fumbling behind him with his hands to make sure that his way was clear. The quiet of the old man's voice had become terrible, and the shadowy face had the eyes of all humanity watching him, accusing him, branding him. He wanted to flee, and then he knew suddenly that he dared not flee, but must stay here and fight the thing out. For all his crimes he felt there were reasons, justifications. He wanted to pour them forth, for here was one man in all the world who would understand and weigh him, and tell him the result. And Keever wanted to be weighed. He who had fled from judgment so many times now understood that all his greatest misery had come because he needed to be judged.

When he tried to speak he found that he was panting. "Who are you?"

"A man. Anyone. Your brother, Keever, if you will have it so."

The gentleness unnerved the big man. He threw out his hands in the darkness.

"Will you listen to me?"

"Talk to me, Keever. It will do you good."

"It was Gandil. Him! Always him at the back of everything. Not that I dodge anything. I'll take the results. But if I go down he'll be under my feet, and I'll send him that much deeper."

"Tell me, Keever."

"Look here, when I was a kid living in this very house I was as clean as they make 'em. Nothing mean about me. I tell you that straight. They'd tell you anywhere in the town that we were a happy family till Gandil came. Curse him! A fine name he had—churchgoer and all that, and quiet ways, and a tongue, and a banking account big enough for ten. One of the first he gathered in with his schemes was dad, and he cleaned him down to the scuttles, but, by heaven, he had such a way that dad kept believing in Gandil and believing in the schemes. And he mortgaged everything he had to get more coin to back the coin he'd lost—and Gandil took the mortgage! Well, and Gandil got our place, too, and we moved out to the edge of the town into a miserable little hole. That was fifteen years ago. I was eleven. And my life splits right in two—the half I lived here, and the half I lived elsewhere.

"But let's get back to that miserable little place. Dad went on working, but he had no spirit left, and pretty soon he was sacked. Then he threw up his hands and let everything go. He said everybody knew he was a failure, and he was going to clear out for a new start. But mother was a fighter. She'd see it through right here, she said, and she worked like the devil trying to splice things together, but nothing held, and on top of that dad breaks down—and breaks down badly. Inside a month we were lined up for charity, but mother wouldn't take no help. You might almost say she furnished the nerve to float us along, she being a little scrap of a body and her hair white; but she had the grit!

"Well, I saw things were going bust. I worked it all out. Everything had been all right till Gandil showed up. Then everything went wrong. Who was to blame? He was. Nothing could be clearer.

"So I slipped out one night—a rainy night—and came back to the old house, with Dick, my dog, sneaking along at my heels. I rang the bell, and when the old housekeeper woman opened the door I told her why I was there. She kept a hand on the door and turned and hollered something and I heard Gandil holler from inside. Then she slammed the door in my face.

"I turned away pretty sick, but a rush of rain came and stung me—that night would have beaten this one. And the sting of the rain made me swear I'd do something before I went back. I sneaked along the veranda till I came to the French windows yonder, and I peered through the glass and saw Gandil sitting at the table reading. I tried the door and it gave easy. So I slipped in.

"'Close the door behind you,' says Gandil, and he put a marker in the book and closed it before he looked up.

" I closed the door, and when I turned round he had his hands folded on the table, each hand as big as two and all sinews and bone. He was looking straight through me, not as if I was a kid, but a man able to look back at him.

" ' You're Keever's boy ? ' he said. ' And you've come here to beg ? '

" It sort of froze me. Besides, it was a cold room. He'd changed the furniture so that everything looked strange and I didn't feel at home at all, and all I could look at was those big hands all blue around the knuckles.

" ' Is that it ? ' he says, while I was standing there trying to warm up my nerve. ' It's no use coming to me. The parish will look after paupers, and I'm not the parish.'

" That roused me and I talked. But all the time I didn't dare meet his eye—you know the iceberg look he had ? But I managed to keep on talking. You see, I'd planned the whole thing from beginning to end. To my fool boy's brain what I said sounded like the real thing ; I thought I was talking business. He was to give me a loan of money to float us through dad's illness, and as soon as I grew up the first thing I'd do would be to pay him back.

" He listened till I'd finished, sort of grinning at me without budging his mouth.

" ' And how do I know that you'll live up to your promise to pay ? ' he asked.

" ' I've thought of that, too,' says I, and I go to the doors and open them and whistle, and in pops Dick, my dog. ' Here's my dog. Here's Dick. I'll give him to you till I can pay the money back.'

" That sounds funny, but it wasn't to me. While I was grieving and fighting the lump out of my throat I heard big Gandil yelling :

" ' Get that damned dog and his muddy feet off my carpet ! '

" Dick sneaked in behind me, growling, and all I could do was stammer at Gandil. It was bearing in on me that he didn't want Dick, and that he wasn't even glad to have him there, and it made my head swim, because I knew at once that there wasn't any use trying to convince a fellow like him. He leaned across his table cursing Dick and Dick's wet feet. Then I exploded. I'm like that. I ran at Gandil and stood on my toes—I was eleven—and jammed the truth about himself right into his face. I told him he was a sneak and a coward and a crook and a cut-throat, and I drew a nice little picture of where he'd come from and where he was going and how long he'd stay. I sent Dick out of the room and turned back and gave Gandil a couple of parting shots that even a dog shouldn't have heard.

" ' My dad's dying,' I said, ' and if he goes ma will go, too. And you'll be a double murderer, Mr. Gandil.'

" All the time he'd been listening to me with a grin, as if he almost enjoyed hearing how fast a kid could talk, but now he jumps up from the table and a shadow jumps up behind him on the wall as big as a giant out of a fairy book.

" ' You dirty-mouthed little blackguard,' says he, not out loud, but whispering to himself, and he shot that long arm of his across the table and caught me under the eye with his fist. I felt the big bony knuckles carve through to the cheekbone and the first warm of the blood go down my face. But I was done before I hit the floor. He'd knocked me clean out.

" When I woke up I was lying outside in the mud with Dick licking my face. Gandil must have picked me up by the scruff of the neck and heaved me through the door like a dog, because I lay in a heap and I was covered with bruises. Well, I got up and crawled home against the wind. When my mother sees me, up go her hands :

" ' You've been out fighting, with your father dying ! ' she says. ' Oh, Heaven, why was I ever given a son like this to curse me ! '

" I crawled upstairs to my room without answering. I was too done for that. I lighted the candle and washed the blood off my face. There was a big ragged cut under my eye, and I knew I was marked for life. It started me thinking. More than once the preacher had told me I'd go to the devil if I didn't mend my ways. I reckoned that the preacher was right. They were all right. So I made up my mind, like a kid, that I'd take one burden off my mother's shoulders ; I'd run away.

" And I did. I whistled Dick after me, and we did five or six miles across country till we came to an old wreck of a barn, and went to sleep in some mouldy straw with Dick shivering beside me and the rain battering down on the roof.

" When I woke up the storm was still coming and the fields were all black mud with a prickling of brown, rotten stubble.

Worst of all, Dick was gone. No whistling would bring him back, and then I knew that in the middle of the night he'd remembered his warm kennel and gone home. There was a traitor for you!

"But I shoved my face into the wind and started tramping again. And from that day to this I've kept on tramping, and the places I've been to and the things I've done haven't been what they might have been. But I've always promised to square things up by doing one good act for the world and coming back to kill Gandil. And here I am—too late! My luck, curse it. But killing would have been too good for him. He needed slow fire. What *would* have been the right end for a fellow like Gandil? I'm what you said. I've got the mark on me, but it was Gandil who put it there!"

"What punishment can you think of for him?" asked the old man.

"To lose his money. That'd be the first thing. He lived for his coin."

"He lost it, Keever."

"He did? Ah, there's one right turn luck has given me!"

"Shall I tell you exactly what became of Gandil?"

"Ay—all of it! And don't leave out the death!"

"You were right. Gandil picked you up and threw you out like a dog. He was in a blind rage, because he knew that a good deal of what you had told him was entirely true. But when he came to his senses he saw the blood on his knuckles, and he was ashamed."

"Bah!" sneered Keever.

"A very great shame, because he was a man of few emotions. And the ones he had were great ones. He ran out to the place where he had thrown you, but you weren't there, but when he ran his fingers over the mud he felt the impression of your body, and he started up and ran after you, calling. But after a moment the rain wet through his coat, and he stopped and told himself he was being a fool over a small matter. He was a very hard man, this Henry Gandil!"

"Ay, he was!"

"He came back to the house still thinking about you, and he made up his mind that in the morning he would do something for your family, but the next morning a business trip took him out of town, and it was a month before he came back. To do him justice, the first thing he remembered when he returned was the Keevers, and he went straight to their new home. They were no longer there. You had been a true prophet. Keever was dead, and his wife had lived only a day or so after him. Gandil heard this story from the neighbours, and went into the house. A new family had moved in already. Gandil stood in the narrow hall and heard the mother singing in the kitchen and a couple of youngsters singing upstairs. And that was when Gandil's torture began, Keever. That was when he knew that he had really murdered two people, and he was stunned. Have you ever had thoughts that bruise the mind? That, I am sure, is the way Gandil felt. You see, it was only his way of living that was bad; in his heart I think there may have been some seeds of good. Just as you, Keever, have many pure and fine emotions and a great deal of pity and generosity, but your way of life has been bad. That was true of Gandil.

"He came out of the little house and across the street he saw the old Catholic priest walking with the widow Henderson. They were both near dead with age, they both walked slowly, but their wrinkled old faces were full of rest. And it seemed to Gandil, to use his own phraseology, which was business talk, that he was bankrupt, and the priest was rich. Yet he had made it his work all his life to take, and the priest had made it his business all his life to give. The problem dazed Gandil. He gazed after them in a torment, wondering what his face would be like at that age, and what new deaths would be upon his conscience.

"He came back to this house, and in the garden he saw your dog, Dick, and tried to whistle him to his hand, but Dick went off to a distance and howled at him."

"Ay, Dick knew him!" snarled Keever. "But skip all the stuff in between and get at the death. That's what I want to know. How did Gandil die?"

"I can show you more clearly than I can tell you," said the other.

¶

HE lighted a match, but at first Keever could only see the hands that sheltered the flame. They were not at all the refined, slender hands of an old recluse and student such as Keever had imagined his host. The great square-tipped, bony fingers were made for seizing and holding, but now a sedentary age had withered the power from them. The flame took hold of the wood, and the

old man raised the match above his head. Keever went a lurching stride forward, and then stopped with a groan.

It was Henry Gandil who sat beyond the table. There was no mistaking that ugly long face, though premature age had blurred the outlines, and the eyes, which had been so keen to see through men, were now dim. He had come nerved for a giant, and this ruin was all that remained! There was one thing that Keever knew profoundly, intimately, and that was pain. Therefore, as he looked into the face of Gandil his hatred faded into a great pity.

"It was you all the time," muttered Keever. "That's a rise on me. It was you all the time I was talking to!"

"No," said Henry Gandil, "there were moments when you were not speaking to any man; certainly not to me. You blamed me for your sins; I accept the blame. But there was something more. Ah, Keever, remember! You were confessing to God."

"What did I say?" panted Keever. "It was the darkness. This spooky darkness—I——"

But his own great voice was so changed, so shaken, that he paused in bewilderment and stretched out his hand like a child asking that his meaning be understood. It was as though he begged alms from yonder man with the starved face. While his eyes were wavering the flame of the match struck a pitchy place and flared so that Keever for the first time discovered more than the face of Gandil. He saw a black gown flowing over the thin ridges which had once been such mighty shoulders: he saw a black collar fitted about the throat; and the truth struck suddenly home in him. On the head of Gandil was the tonsure and on his body the black robe of a priest.

March

MARCH comes—in a garden, windless dusk,
There is an end of snowing,
And winter breaks like an outworn husk,
With pale grass showing;

The stars fade whitely into dawn;
The pale gold sunlight gleaming
Across a myriad-jewelled lawn
Sets hearts to dreaming;

Then wistful, strange, wild ecstasies,
And agony of spring returning,
Stretching the naked soul of trees
With poignant yearning—

Swift moods of sunshine and grey mist,
And a bitter, keen wind blowing;
In a ragged veil of amethyst
March comes—no knowing!

ETHEL M. POMEROY.

Peter's Pence

Concerning three wise men and a misunderstanding

By W. W. JACOBS

SAILORMEN don't bother much about their relations as a rule, said the night-watchman; sometimes because a railway ticket costs as much as a barrel o' beer, and they ain't got the money for both, and sometimes because most relations run away with the idea that a sailorman has been knocking about 'arf over the world just to bring them 'ome presents.

Then, agin, some relations are partikler about appearances, and they don't like it if a chap don't wear a collar and tidy 'imself up. Dress is everything nowadays; put me in a top-'at and a tail-coat, with a twopenny smoke stuck in my mouth, and who would know the difference between me and a lord? Put a bishop in my clothes, and you'd ask 'im to 'ave a 'arf-pint as soon as you would me—sooner, p'r'aps.

Talking of relations reminds me of Peter Russet's uncle. It's some years ago now, and Peter and old Sam Small and Ginger Dick 'ad just come back arter being away for nearly ten months. They 'ad all got money in their pockets, and they was just talking about the spree they was going to have, when a letter was brought to Peter, wot had been waiting for 'im at the office.

He didn't like opening it at fust. The last letter he had 'ad kept 'im hiding indoors for a week, and then made him ship a fortnight afore 'e had meant to. He stood turning it over and over, and at last, arter Sam, wot was always a curious man, 'ad told 'im that if he didn't open it he'd do it for 'im, he tore it open and read it.

"It's from my old uncle, George Goodman," he ses, staring. "Why, I ain't seen 'im for over twenty years."

"Do you owe 'im any money?" ses Sam.

Peter shook his 'ead. "He's up in London," he ses, looking at the letter agin, "up in London for the fust time in thirty-three years, and he wants to come and stay with me so that I can show 'im about."

"Wot is he?" ses Sam.

"He's retired," ses Peter, trying not to speak proud.

"Got money?" ses Sam, with a start.

"I b'leeve so," ses Peter, in a off-hand way. "I don't s'pose 'e lives on air."

"Any wives or children?" ses Sam.

"No," ses Peter. "He 'ad a wife, but she died."

"Then you have 'im, Peter," ses Sam, wot was always looking out for money. "Don't throw away a opportunity like that. Why, if you treat 'im well he might leave it all to you."

"No such luck," ses Peter.

"You do as Sam ses," ses Ginger. "I wish I'd got an uncle."

"We'll try and give 'im a good time," ses Sam, "and if he's anything like Peter we shall enjoy ourselves."

"Yes; but he ain't," ses Peter. "He's a very solemn, serious-minded man, and a strong teetotaller. Wot you'd call a glass o' beer he'd call pison. That's 'ow he got on. He's thought a great deal of in 'is place, I can tell you, but he ain't my sort."

"That's a bit orkard," ses Sam, scratching his 'ead. "Same time, it don't do to throw away a chance. If 'e was my uncle I should pretend to be a teetotaller while 'e was here, just to please 'im."

"And when you felt like a drink, Peter," ses Ginger, "me and Sam would look arter 'im while you slipped off to get it."

"He could 'ave the room below us," ses Sam. "It is empty."

Peter gave a sniff. "Wot about you and Ginger?" he ses.

"Well, wot about us?" ses Sam and Ginger, both together.

"Why, you'd 'ave to be teetotallers, too," ses Peter. "Wot's the good o' me pretending to be steady if 'e sees I've got pals like you?"

Sam scratched his 'ead agin, ever so long, and at last he ses, "Well, mate," he ses, "drink don't trouble me *nor* Ginger. We can do without it, as far as that goes; and

we must all take it in turns to keep the old gentleman busy while the others go and get wot they want. You'd better go and take the room downstairs for 'im, afore it goes."

Peter looked at 'im in surprise, but that was Sam all over. The idea o' knowing a man with money was too much for 'im, and he sat there giving good advice to Peter about 'is behaviour until Peter didn't know whether it was 'is uncle or Sam's. 'Owever, he took the room and wrote the letter, and next arternoon at three o'clock Mr. Goodman came in a four-wheel cab with a big bag and a fat umbrella. A short stiffish-built man of about sixty he was, with 'is top lip shaved and a bit o' short grey beard. He 'ad on a top-'at and a tail-coat, black kid gloves and a little black bow, and he didn't answer the cabman back a single word.

He seemed quite pleased to see Peter, and by-and-by Sam, who was bursting with curiosity, came downstairs to ask Peter to lend 'im a boot-lace, and was interduced. Then Ginger came down to look for Sam, and in a few minutes they was all talking as comfortable as possible.

"I ain't seen Peter for twenty years," ses Mr. Goodman—"twenty long years!"

Sam shook his 'ead and looked at the floor.

"I happened to go and see Peter's sister—my niece Polly," ses Mr. Goodman, "and she told me the name of 'is ship. It was quite by chance, because she told me it was the fust letter she had 'ad from him in seven years."

"I didn't think it was so long as that," ses Peter. "Time passes so quick."

His uncle nodded. "Ah, so it does," 'e ses. "It's all the same whether we spend it on the foaming ocean or pass our little lives ashore."

"The main thing," ses Peter, in a good voice, "is to pass it properly."

"Then it don't matter," ses Ginger.

"I held 'im in my arms when 'e was a baby," ses Mr. Goodman, looking at Peter.

"Fond o' children?" ses Sam.

Mr. Goodman nodded. "Fond of everybody," he ses.

"That's 'ow Peter is," ses Ginger; "specially young——"

Peter Russet and Sam both turned and looked at 'im very sharp.

"Children," ses Ginger, remembering 'imself, "*and* teetotallers. I s'pose it is being a teetotaller 'imself."

"Is Peter a teetotaller?" ses Mr. Goodman. "I'd no idea of it. Wot a joyful thing!"

"It was your example wot put it into his 'ead fust, I b'leeve," ses Sam, looking at Peter for 'im to notice 'ow clever he was.

"And then, Sam and Ginger Dick being teetotallers, too," ses Peter, "we all, natural-like, keep together."

Mr. Goodman said they was wise men, and, arter a little more talk, he said 'ow would it be if they went out and saw a little bit of the great wicked city. They all said they would, and Ginger got quite excited about it until he found that it meant London.

They got a 'bus at Aldgate, and fust of all they went to the British Museum, and when Mr. Goodman was tired o' that—and long arter the others was—they went into a place and 'ad a nice strong cup o' tea and a piece o' cake each. When they come out o' there they all walked about looking at the shops until they was tired out, and arter wot Mr. Goodman said was a very improving evening they all went 'ome.

¶

SAM and Ginger went 'ome just for the look o' the thing, and arter waiting a few minutes in their room they crept downstairs agin to spend wot was left of the evening. They went down as quiet as mice, but, for all that, just as they was passing Mr. Goodman's room the door opened and Peter, in a polite voice, asked 'em to step inside.

"We was just *thinking* you'd be dull up there all alone," he ses.

Sam lost 'is presence o' mind, and afore he knew wot 'e was doing 'im and Ginger 'ad walked in and sat down. They sat there for over an hour and a 'arf talking, and then Sam, with a look at Ginger, said they must be going, because he 'ad got to call for a pair o' boots he 'ad left to be mended.

"Why, Sam, wot are you thinking of?" ses Peter, who didn't want anybody to 'ave wot he couldn't. "Why, the shop's shut."

"I don't think so," ses Sam, glaring at 'im. "Anyway, we can go and see."

Peter said he'd go with 'im, and just as they got to the door Mr. Goodman said he'd go too. O' course, the shops was shut, and arter Mr. Goodman 'ad stood on Tower Hill admiring the Tower by moonlight till Sam felt ready to drop, they all walked back. Three times Sam's boot-lace come undone, but as the others all stopped too to see 'im do it up it didn't do 'im much good.

Wot with temper and dryness 'e could 'ardly bid Peter " Good night."

Sam and Ginger 'ad something the next morning, but morning ain't the time for it; and arter they had 'ad dinner Mr. Goodman asked 'em to go to the Zoological Gardens with 'im. He paid for them all, and he 'ad a lot to say about kindness to animals and 'ow you could do anything with 'em a'most by kindness. He walked about the place talking like a book, and when a fat monkey, wot was pretending to be asleep, got a bit o' Sam's whisker, he said it was on'y instink, and the animal had no wish to do 'im 'arm.

" Very likely thought it was doing you a kindness, Sam," ses Ginger.

Mr. Goodman said it was very likely, afore Sam could speak, and arter walking about and looking at the other things they come out and 'ad a nice strong, 'ot cup o' tea, same as they 'ad the day before, and then walked about not knowing what to do with themselves.

Sam got tired of it fust, and catching Ginger's eye said he thought it was time to get 'ome in case too much enjoyment wasn't good for 'em. His idea was to get off with Ginger and make a night of it, and when 'e found Peter and his uncle was coming too, he began to think that things was looking serious.

" I don't want to spile your evening," he ses, very polite. " I must get 'ome to mend a pair o' trowsis o' mine, but there's no need for you to come."

" I'll come and watch you," ses Peter's uncle.

" And then I'm going off to bed early," ses Sam.

" Me, too," ses Ginger, and Peter said he could hardly keep 'is eyes open.

They got on a 'bus, and as Sam was about to foller Ginger and Peter on top, Mr. Goodman took hold of 'im by the arm and said they'd go inside. He paid two penny fares, and while Sam was wondering 'ow to tell 'im that it would be threepence each, the 'bus stopped to take up a passenger and he got up and moved to the door.

" They've gone up there," he ses, pointing.

Afore Sam could stop 'im he got off, and Sam, full o' surprise, got off too, and follered 'im on to the pavement.

" Who's gone up there? " he ses, as the 'bus went on agin.

" Peter and Mr. Ginger Dick," ses Mr. Goodman. " But don't you trouble. You go 'ome and mend your trowsis."

" But they're on the 'bus," ses Sam, staring. " Dick and Peter, I mean."

Mr. Goodman shook his 'ead.

" They got off. Didn't you see 'em? " he ses.

" No," ses Sam. " I'll swear they didn't."

" Well, it's my mistake, I s'pose," ses Peter's uncle. " But you get off home; I'm not tired yet, and I'll walk."

Sam said 'e wasn't very tired and he walked along wondering whether Mr. Goodman was quite right in his 'ead. For one thing, 'e seemed upset about something or other, and kept taking little peeps at 'im in a way he couldn't understand at all.

" It was nice tea we 'ad this arternoon," ses Mr. Goodman at last.

" De-licious," ses Sam.

" Trust a teetotaller for knowing good tea," ses Mr. Goodman. " I expect Peter enjoyed it. I s'pose 'e is a very strict teetotaller? "

" Strict ain't the word for it," ses Sam, trying to do 'is duty by Peter. " We all are."

" That's right," ses Mr. Goodman, and he pushed his 'at back and looked at Sam very serious. They walked on a bit further, and then Peter's uncle stopped sudden just as they was passing a large public-'ouse and looked at Sam.

" I don't want Peter to know, 'cos it might alarm 'im," he ses, " but I've come over a bit faint. I'll go in 'ere for 'arf a minnit and sit down. You'd better wait outside."

" I'll come in with you, in case you want help," ses Sam. " I don't mind wot people think."

Mr. Goodman tried to persuade him not to, but it was all no good, and at last 'e walked in and sat down on a tall stool that stood agin the bar, and put his hand to his 'ead.

" I s'pose we shall 'ave to 'ave something," he ses in a whisper to Sam; " we can't expect to come in and sit down for nothing. What'll you take? "

Sam looked at 'im, but he might just as well ha' looked at a brass door-knob.

" I—I—I'll 'ave a small ginger-beer," he ses at last, " a very small one."

" One small ginger," ses Mr. Goodman to the barmaid, " and one special Scotch."

Sam could 'ardly believe his ears, and he stood there 'oldin' his glass o' ginger-beer and watching Peter's teetotal uncle drink whisky, and thought 'e must be dreaming.

" I dessay it seems very shocking to you," ses Mr. Goodman, putting down 'is glass and dryin' 'is lips on each other, " but I find it useful for these attacks."

" I—I s'pose the flavour's very nasty ? " ses Sam, taking a sip at 'is ginger-beer.

" Not exactly wot you could call nasty," ses Mr. Goodman, " though I dessay it would seem so to you. I don't suppose you could swallow it ? "

" I don't s'pose I could," ses Sam, " but I've a good mind to 'ave a try. If it's good for one teetotaller I don't see why it should hurt another."

Mr. Goodman looked at 'im very hard, and then he ordered a whisky and stood watching while Sam, arter pretending for a minit to look at it, as though 'e didn't know wot to do with it, took a sip and let it roll round 'is mouth.

" Well ? " ses Mr. Goodman, looking at 'im anxious-like.

" It ain't so 'orrid as I 'ad fancied," ses Sam, lapping up the rest very gentle. " 'Ave you 'ad enough to do you all the good it ought to ? "

Mr. Goodman said that it was no good 'arf doing a thing, and p'r'aps he 'ad better 'ave one more ; and arter Sam 'ad paid for the next two they went out arm-in-arm.

" 'Ow cheerful everybody looks ! " ses Mr. Goodman, smiling.

" They're going to amuse theirselves, I expect," ses Sam—" music-'alls and such like."

Mr. Goodman shook his 'ead at 'em.

" Music 'alls ain't so bad as some people try to make out," ses Sam. " Look 'ere ; I took some drink to see what the flavour was like ; suppose you go to a music'all to see wot that's like ? "

" It seems on'y fair," ses Peter's uncle, considering.

" It is fair," ses Sam, and twenty minutes arterwards they was sitting in a music-'all drinking each other's 'ealths and listening to the songs—Mr. Goodman with a big cigar in 'is mouth and his 'at cocked over one eye, and Sam beating time to the music with 'is pipe.

" 'Ow do you like it ? " he ses.

Mr. Goodman didn't answer 'im because 'e was joining in the chorus with one side of 'is mouth and keeping 'is cigar alight with the other. He just nodded at 'im ; but 'e looked so 'appy that Sam felt it was a pleasure to sit there and look at 'im. " I wonder wot Peter and Ginger is doin' ? " he ses, when the song was finished.

" I don't know," ses Mr. Goodman, " and, wot's more, I don't care. If I'd 'ad any idea that Peter was like wot he is I should never 'ave wrote to 'im. I can't think 'ow you can stand 'im."

" He ain't so bad," ses Sam, wondering whether he ought to tell 'im 'arf of wot Peter really was like.

" *Bad !* " ses Mr. Goodman. " I come up to London for a 'oliday—a change, mind you—and I thought Peter and me was going to 'ave a good time. Instead o' that, he goes about with a face as long as a fiddle. He don't drink, 'e don't go to places of amusement—innercent places of amusement—and 'is idea of enjoying life is to go walking about the streets and drinking cups o' tea."

" We must try and alter 'im," ses Sam, arter doing a bit o' thinking.

" Certainly not," ses Mr. Goodman, laying his 'and on Sam's knee. " Far be it from me to interfere with a feller-creature's ideas o' wot's right. Besides, he might get writing to 'is sister agin, and she might tell my wife."

" But Peter said she was dead," ses Sam, very puzzled.

" I married agin," ses Peter's uncle, in a whisper, 'cos people was telling 'im to keep quiet, " a tartar—a perfect tartar. She's in a 'orsepittle at present, else I shouldn't ha' been able to come if I 'adn't found five pounds wot she'd hid in a match-box up the chimbley."

" But wot'll you do when she finds it out ? " ses Sam, opening 'is eyes.

" I'm going to 'ave the house cleaned and the chimbleys swept to welcome 'er 'ome," ses Mr. Goodman, taking a sip o' whisky. " It'll be a little surprise for her."

They stayed till it was over, and on the 'bus he gave Sam some strong peppermint lozenges wot 'e always carried about with 'im, and took some 'imself. He said 'e found 'em helpful.

" What are we going to tell Peter and Ginger ? " ses Sam, as they got near the 'ouse.

" Tell 'em ? " ses Mr. Goodman. " Tell 'em the truth. How we follered 'em when they got off the 'bus, and 'ave been looking for 'em ever since. I'm not going to 'ave

my 'oliday spoilt by a teetotal nevvy, I can tell you."

He started on Peter, wot was sitting on his bed with Ginger waiting for them, the moment he got inside, and all Ginger and Peter could say didn't make any difference.

"Mr. Small see you as plain as what I did," he ses.

"But I tell you we come straight 'ome," ses Ginger, "and we've been waiting for you 'ere ever since."

Mr. Goodman shook his 'ead. "Say no more about it," he ses, in a kind voice. "I dessay it's rather tiresome for young men to go about with two old ones, and in future, if you and Peter keep together me and my friend Mr. Small will do the same."

Sam shook 'ands with 'im, and though Peter tried his 'ardest to make 'im alter his mind it was no good. His uncle patted 'im on the shoulder, and said they'd try it for a few days, at any rate, and Ginger, wot thought it was a very good idea, backed 'im up. Everybody seemed pleased with the idea except Peter Russet, but arter Sam 'ad told 'im in private wot a high opinion 'is uncle 'ad got of 'im, and 'ow well off he was, 'e gave way.

¶

THEY all enjoyed the next evening, and Sam and Mr. Goodman got on together like twin brothers. They went to a place of amusement every night, and the on'y unpleasantness that happened was when Peter's uncle knocked a chemist's shop up at a quarter-past twelve one night to buy a penn'orth o' peppermint lozenges.

They 'ad four of the 'appiest evenings together that Sam 'ad ever known; and Mr. Goodman would 'ave been just as 'appy too if it hadn't ha' been for the thoughts o' that five pounds. The more 'e thought of it the more unlikely it seemed that 'is wife would blame it on the sweep, and one night he took the match-box out of 'is pocket and shook his 'ead over it till Sam felt quite sorry for 'im.

"Don't take up your troubles afore they come," he ses. "'Orsepittles are dangerous places."

Mr. Goodman cheered up a bit at that, but he got miserable agin the next night because 'is money was getting low and he wanted another week in London.

"I've got seven shillings and fourpence and two stamps left," he ses. "Where it's all gone to I can't think."

"Don't you worry about that," ses Sam. "I've got a pound or two left yet."

"No, I ain't going to be a burden on you," ses Mr. Goodman, "but another week I must 'ave, so I must get the money somehow. Peter can't spend much, the way he goes on."

Sam gave a little cough.

"I'll get a pound or two out o' 'im," ses Mr. Goodman.

Sam coughed agin. "Won't he think it rather funny?" he ses, arter a bit.

"Not if it's managed properly," ses Mr. Goodman, thinking 'ard. "I'll tell you 'ow we'll do it. To-morrow morning, while we are eating of our breakfast, you ask me to lend you a pound or two."

Sam, what 'ad just taken up 'is glass for a drink, put it down agin and stared at 'im.

"But I don't want no money," he ses; "and, besides, you 'aven't got any."

"You do as I tell you," ses Mr. Goodman, "and when you've got it, you hand it over to me, see? Ask me to lend you five pounds."

Sam thought as 'ow the whisky 'ad got to Mr. Goodman's 'ead at last. 'Owever, to pacify 'im he promised to do wot 'e was told, and next morning, when they was all at breakfast, he looks over and catches Mr. Goodman's eye.

"I wonder if I might be so bold as to ask a favour of you?" he ses.

"Certainly," ses Peter's uncle, "and glad I shall be to oblige you. There is no man I've got a greater respect for."

"Thankee," ses Sam. "The fact is, I've run a bit short owing to paying a man some money I owed 'im. If you could lend me five pounds, I couldn't thank you enough.'

Mr. Goodman put down 'is knife and fork and wrinkled up 'is forehead.

"I'm very sorry," he ses, feeling in 'is pockets; "do you want it to-day?"

"Yes; I should like it," ses Sam.

"It's most annoying," ses Mr. Goodman, "but I was so afraid o' pickpockets that I didn't bring much away with me. If you could wait till the day arter to-morrow, when my money is sent to me, you can 'ave ten if you like."

"You're very kind," ses Sam, "but that 'ud be too late for me. I must try and get it somewhere else."

Peter and Ginger went on eating their breakfast, but every time Peter looked up he caught 'is uncle looking at 'im in such a

surprised and disappointed sort o' way that 'e didn't like the look of it at all.

" I could just do it for a couple o' days, Sam," he ses at last, " but it'll leave me very short."

" That's right," ses his uncle smiling. " My nevvy, Peter Russet, will lend it to you, Mr. Small, of 'is own free will. He 'as offered afore he was asked, and that's the proper way to do it, in my opinion."

He reached acrost the table and shook 'ands with Peter, and said that generosity ran in their family, and something seemed to tell 'im as Peter wouldn't lose by it. Everybody seemed pleased with each other, and arter Ginger Dick and Peter 'ad gone out Mr. Goodman took the five pounds off of old Sam and stowed 'em away very careful in the match-box.

" It's nice to 'ave money agin," he ses. " There's enough for a week's enjoyment here."

" Yes," ses Sam, slow-like ; " but wot I want to know is, wot about the day arter to-morrow, when Peter expects 'is money ? "

Mr. Goodman patted 'im on the shoulder.

" Don't you worry about Peter's troubles," he ses. " I know exactly what to do ; it's all planned out. Now I'm going to 'ave a lay down for an hour—I didn't get much sleep last night—and if you'll call me at twelve o'clock we'll go somewhere. Knock loud."

He patted 'im on the shoulder agin, and Sam, after fidgeting about a bit, went out. The last time he ever see Peter's uncle he was laying on the bed with 'is eyes shut, smiling in his sleep. And Peter Russet didn't see Sam for eighteen months.

Important Announcement

The MAY Issue of

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"'Melia, No Good"

And the one thing she understood

By I. A. R. WYLIE

SOME people may think this rather a sad story. But Amelia Alexandria Nobbs, whom it most concerns, would have been puzzled by such an opinion. To her it was just everyday life, not in the least touching or thrilling or anything else, but with a glorious ending which certainly did bring it almost on a level with a picture-palace romance—the only sort of romance she had ever known. At any rate, she was never sad about it—not at any time.

Ambrose Nobbs was Amelia Alexandria's father, and in addition, as Mrs. Nobbs often declared, a trying specimen of a very trying sex. For one thing, the most ordinary events drove him to extremes, which met as extremes often do, in the nearest public-house. Thus, when Henry Nobbs—Amelia's elder brother—was born, Mr. Nobbs drank himself into an Olympian state of exuberance and pride, and was only brought to earth a week later when the callous refusal of an unfeeling barman acquainted him with the fact that the lately increased and glorious family of Nobbs had temporarily "gone bust." Contrariwise, when five years later Amelia Alexandria made her unwelcome appearance, Mr. Nobbs became melancholic. In vain the most royal and high-sounding names were chosen for the luckless and unlovely stranger. Mr. Nobbs persisted in feeling aggrieved.

"A gal!" he ejaculated bitterly. "A bloomin' gal! No good they ain't—no good at all. One woman in the 'ouse is one too many, that's wot I say."

After which unchivalrous declaration Mr. Nobbs had another pint and wept copiously over his sorrows.

The process of drowning his sorrow was a lengthy one; in fact, it was a very tough sorrow with any amount of life, so that with the best will in the world Mr. Nobbs never got the better of it, though he stuck to the task with a heroic constancy. About the same time Mrs. Nobbs herself began to be "took bad." Whether she caught her husband's pessimistic attitude towards life, or whether the task of making two seriously estranged ends meet was too much for her, cannot be said. At any rate, by the time Amelia Alexandria was fourteen Mrs. Nobbs had completely lost her taste for charing, and the increasing frequency of her "attacks" made visits to the "Welsh Harp" a daily necessity. There she discoursed at length and with eloquence to a sympathetic audience who agreed that "Mrs. Nobbs 'ad 'ad an 'ard life," and enthusiastically accepted her invitation to "'ave another."

"And the 'ardest blow of all 'as been 'Melia," Mrs. Nobbs would conclude tearfully. "My belief is she ain't quite sixteen ounces to the pound as they say, and that ugly! Though I says it as shouldn't, she didn't get 'er looks from me, Gawd be thanked. She ain't no good for anything is 'Melia."

'Melia grew up with the phrase ringing in her ears.

II

SHE woke long before the winter sun had begun to show itself wanly through the grey fog which never really lifted from the roofs of Mountjoy Alley. It had become an instinct—this regular waking—but for once she lay still, wondering why on this particular morning it should be different from all the others. Then she remembered. Cautiously, like an anxious mouse, she crept out from underneath the sacking which filled the double rôle of sheet and blanket, and reaching out for her stockings. They were very remarkable stockings, and when Amelia's toes emerged from the large unconventional apertures they wriggled indignantly, rubbing each other, in a frenzied effort to keep warm.

Amelia paid no attention to their woes, but set them to feel their way over the bare boards. From long experience they knew of the perilous possibility of encountering nails, or bits of glass, or Mr. Nobbs's

discarded boots, so they went gingerly and noiselessly. 'Melia knew just where everything was to be found and what to avoid. There was Mr. Nobbs himself in one corner and Mrs. Nobbs in the other with the twins between them in a large converted soap-box. Perhaps some people may think the garret improperly overcrowded, but in Mountjoy Alley, five to a room was considered a decent average.

A subdued chink of cracked china and a timid splash, mingled with the family's deep breathing, announced that 'Melia washed. Then all was quiet again, until at the other end of the room a match spluttered feebly. With blue, stiff fingers 'Melia ordered the scanty sticks and the precious lumps of coal, and presently a small, smoky fire sent a pale comfort into the shivering darkness. It was the great moment in 'Melia's day. There was so much greyness all about her, with never a bright colour or a bright light anywhere. If there had ever been any colour in Mountjoy Alley it had grown dim long since. The sky was grey, and the houses were grey, and the puddles in the street and the people who slipped like ghosts in and out of the murky doorways. Even the sunshine, when it *did* come, had a dingy tinge.

But the fire kindling before daybreak in the poky little grate was a wonderful thing. It was a friendly spirit that sprang from nowhere and glowed and twinkled and warmed 'Melia's frozen little hands lovingly. It showed her fairy castles in its red heart, and its smoke wreathed itself into goblins who leapt out at her and disported themselves among the shadows.

Later on, when the daylight slunk through the dirty windows, it was just like all the other Mountjoy fires—very sickly, smoky and disgruntled.

The crackling of the wood aroused the twins, who whimpered, and their whimpering aroused Mrs. Nobbs, who groaned terribly. From the opposite corner came the muffled sound of Mr. Nobbs's early morning curse.

"That you 'Melia?"

"Yus, Dad."

"Tea ready?"

"Water ain't biled yet."

"Well, 'urry up, can't yer? D'yer want a poor working man to go out into the cold without even a cup o' tea? A nice thing! Where'd you be, I'd like to know, if I was took? If that tea ain't ready when I am, my gal, somebody'll be sorry about it——"

Mrs. Nobbs heaved herself up against the wall with another groan.

"If I ain't gone and got 'em again!" she exclaimed gloomily. "Somethink awful. Just 'ere—in me side. Oh, yer may well laugh, Hambrose Nobbs! Wot cher know about a wimmin's sufferin's? And 'oo's fault is it I 'ave to be 'ere in all this misery—me wot used to 'ave a 'ouse of me own and a parlour with plush furniture—'oo's fault is it——?"

Her voice had risen to a wail, and Mr. Nobbs flung his boot in her direction. But his aim was not what it had been, and the boot struck the soap-box, causing the contents to howl in unison.

"'Old yer tongue, will you?"

"I won't 'old my tongue. Gawd knows it's about all that's left me. 'Melia, when you've done messin' with that tea you can stop them kids yellin'. Ain't yer got no 'eart for yer poor mother's nerves?"

The tea was made by this time. It was a very simple process. All you did was to put a couple of spoonfuls of "special blend" into the kettle and let it stew. When the water was nearly black it was called tea, and you drank it with the assurance that you were getting your money's worth.

'Melia fetched the twins one by one and set them sniffing and sobbing in their grubby little shirts before the fire. She carried them, tottering under their weight, for though it was only five years since they had been added to Mrs. Nobbs's other grievances, they had thriven strangely. But 'Melia, somehow, had not thriven. It was as though their boisterous vitality had sapped the life in her. She was fourteen, and she looked like a stunted, fragile child of ten.

Mr. Nobbs, half-dressed by now, his braces hanging, slip-slopped over to the fire and poured himself out a mug of tea with a shaking hand. He, too, was part of the greyness—grey-haired, grey stubble on leaden, sunken cheeks. Compared with him, Mrs. Nobbs, still propped up and groaning dismally, with the firelight on her baggy, weak-featured face, seemed the embodiment of life.

"Wot about me, eh? Ain't I goin' to get nothin'? Not that I expect it. Oh, no, not me. I know wot 'appens to them 'oo toil themselves to skin and bone for others. Left

to starve in their beds—that's it—starve in their——"

"Oh, take 'er 'er tea, can't yer? Look 'ere, if you two brats don't stop that row I'll bash yer 'eads together, I will."

'Melia came back to the fire and crouched down beside the twins, who, regaled with a mug of tea and a slab of stale bread, continued to sniff, but at increasingly long intervals. Mr. Nobbs glanced at her resentfully. She was not even a pretty child. The little narrow face that peered out from amidst short, wispy black hair was old—inexpressibly old. It was almost repellent in its unyouthfulness. It gave people who saw her for the first time the same sense of shock and vague physical discomfort as the face of a grown man or woman with a dwarfed body. It gave Mr. Nobbs, whose nervous system was at its worst in the early morning, an attack of what he called the "jim-jams."

"I don't see wot you've got to look blue about," he burst out fiercely. "You ain't got to turn out in the cold to earn bread for a lot of greedy brats. You can sit 'ere and roast yourself. Wot 'ave you got to grumble at? I'd like to know."

'Melia blinked at the fire.

"Nothink."

"Well, then, don't do it. Look cheerful!" A sudden recollection came to him. "Fourteen to-day, ain't yer?"

'Melia nodded, and Mr. Nobbs growled disgustedly.

"Fourteen years of bad luck, that's wot it's been. Well, you don't 'ave to go to school no more, that's one good thing."

"Teacher said——"

"Well, wot did yer teacher say?"

"——p'raps I might go on a bit."

"Go on? Wot for? Wot's the use of larnin' you anythink? You ain't no good. Fourth standard, ain't it?"

"Yus."

"Fourth standard! Think of that! Why, when 'Enry left he was in the seventh—top of it too—eh, mother?"

It was not often that Mr. Nobbs addressed Mrs. Nobbs as "mother." But at the name "'Enry" a change had come over them all. Even the twins sat still with an awed look on their small, smeary faces. It was as though a magician had lifted for a moment the cloud of squalor and misery and hopelessness from the garret. The fire seemed to burn more clearly. It danced its reflection pryingly on the five faces that were turned to it in sudden thoughtfulness. The sullen, peevish resentment in Mr. Nobbs's eyes had brightened to a look of triumph. Mrs. Nobbs smiled a slow, fat smile.

"Yus, 'e *was* a clever lad, was 'Enry!"

"'E'll get somewhere before 'e's done, you can tike my word for it. I saw 'im the other day, walking with a gal—a reg'lar lady. And 'e 'ad a bowler 'at and an overcoat like them swells 'ave, with skirts to it, an' a button 'ole—a carnation."

"Why, Ambrose, you never told me! Did you speak to 'im?"

Mr. Nobbs's eyelids dropped. He rubbed the knees of his shabby trousers with the palms of his hands.

"No, I didn't. Wot cher tike me for? 'Im a gent and me a workin' man. A nice thing! But I watched 'im—I followed 'im for a bit. It made me come over queer to think of that fine young chap bein' my son——"

In the following silence 'Melia's voice sounded thin and quavering.

"Teacher said, p'raps if I stayed on——"

Mr. Nobbs sprang up with a roar.

"Never you mind wot your teacher said! I won't 'ave none of it. You'll come 'ome and 'elp your mother and your poor old father. We've kept you idle long enough. You've got to earn your keep now, d'yer 'ear?"

'Melia heard. She began to dress the twins, and their unquenchable exuberance kept her from further unwelcome manifestations. Presently Mr. Nobbs went out. Nobody enquired as to his return. No one knew what he did with his day, and since he provided nothing towards the upkeep of the establishment, nobody cared. It was presumed that he earned enough to pay for his drinks, and that was all that could be expected of him.

'Melia washed the mugs and brought what order was possible into the squalid chaos. By that time the window had begun to show a pale outline, and in the cold, grey reality of daylight the fire grew dim and colourless. Mrs. Nobbs twisted her red, ungainly fingers impatiently in the dirty coverlet.

"Near time for you to be off, ain't it, 'Melia?"

"Yus, Ma."

"'Melia!"

"Yus?"

"Look 'ere, you ask Mrs. Pugmire to let you 'ave a bit in advance, there's a good

girl. On the way 'ome you can get a drop or two at the ' 'Arp.' Them pains is coming on frightful. You wouldn't 'ave your poor old mother suffer, would you, 'Melia ? "

" P'raps Mrs. Pugmire won't."

A dull flush crept under the coarse skin. Mrs. Nobbs leant out over the bed and caught her daughter by the arm with a strength that had made her famous in earlier days.

" You'll do as I tell you, you ugly little tike, and no back chat either ! D'yer 'ear ? "

'Melia heard. She showed no sign of resentment or pain. It was all part of life. She took a dilapidated black straw hat from a nail in the wall and set it on her small head with a wistful care. Once it had been a very beautiful hat with flowers round the crown, and even now three dilapidated daisies still clung dejectedly to their moorings. They gave 'Melia a queer, warm thrill when she looked at them. It was like looking at the fire—she did not know why. Nor did she know in the least that it was a thrill of happiness.

" You 'urry up, now ! " said Mrs. Nobbs drowsily.

The door closed, and the wooden stairs creaked under the flying feet.

Mrs. Nobbs heaved over with her face to the wall and slept the sleep of the just.

III

MRS. PUGMIRE was on the doorstep polishing a massive brass plate on which was inscribed : " Jenkins and Smythe, Solicitors. Commissioners for Oaths," a description which thereafter lent Mr. Nobbs's language an awful official solemnity in 'Melia's ears. Mrs. Pugmire had also been making up fires, and her round, good-natured face was black.

" Bit late, ain't yer, 'Melia ? "

" Yus. Mother was took bad again." She was panting, and her thin little legs trembled under her. " Spasims," she added impressively.

Mrs. Pugmire made a face at the " solicitors."

" Well, get along in. First room on the right. I've put a duster on the table for you. You make things clean and tidy before the gents come. They'll be that angry if they find us about. They likes to think the hangels dusted for 'em in the night. You'll 'ave to 'urry."

'Melia hurried. She hid her hat under a table, and, having found the duster, set to work with the fierce, desperate energy of an apprentice hand. The yellow dinginess of the place did not depress her, for that, too, was only normal, but the solemn book-cases, the great desks and amazingly high stools were vaguely terrifying. They watched her in severe, judicial silence. They disapproved of her. When she tried to dust their loftiness they seemed to draw themselves up to their full height, disdaining her. She scurried to and fro among them bravely, but she was so small that she had to scramble up on to the high stools to reach the desks at all, and the ascent and descent were alike perilous.

And hunting at her heels was the thought of the " gents " and their possible and awful anger.

She was perched on the highest stool of all—a treacherous thing with a slithery, polished seat which had already unhorsed her once—when the door opposite opened and a young man entered. ' Melia could just see him over the top of a barrier of inkpots. An unbiassed observer would not have been particularly impressed by the apparition. He had fair, lank hair, a pink face inclined to pimples, and a red tie—a very ordinary young man, in fact. But if St. George in full armour with the dragon ignominiously in tow had burst upon her 'Melia could not have been more overwhelmed. She clutched at the largest inkpot, which tipped over with obliging promptness and sent a blue stream down the desk on to the floor. As to the young man, he shut the door behind him in the most approved manner of melodrama His jaw had dropped.

" Amelia ! what the dickens are you up to here ? "

'Melia gulped.

" Charin'—'elpin' Mrs. Pugmire."

" What for ? "

" Tuppence——"

" Oh, I don't mean that ! Why aren't you at school ? "

" Don't go to school no more."

" Didn't you know I was here ? "

" No. Didn't know nothink—not where you was, 'Enry."

The young man recovered his composure. Very deliberately he divested himself of his overcoat and hat and hung them up behind the door. 'Melia, who still clung to her perch, watched him in awe-struck silence. It was true. There was the

fashionable coat—" skirts " and all—and the buttonhole and the bowler. When he discovered the still flowing stream of ink she was less stricken with horror at her own deed as joy at the perfection of his disgust.

" Clumsy little blighter, aren't you ? "

" Yus." She mopped up the ink with Mrs. Pugmire's duster, thereby for ever forfeiting her right to tuppence. " Ma says I ain't no good at nothink," she added humbly.

Henry Nobbs did not offer any polite contradiction. He took his place at the now immaculate desk and began to turn back his cuffs. He seemed to have forgotten 'Melia's presence. She stood apart, the soaking duster squeezed between her hands, her eyes wide, a little breath of colour in each sunken cheek. This was Henry—their Henry—their one pride and glory, the solitary and splendid star in their black firmament, far removed from them and yet theirs to gaze upon—Henry, who had been top of the seventh standard, who had won prizes, and made friends with fine gentlemen, and finally had become a gentleman with a nobby overcoat and a bowler and a flower in his buttonhole. It gave 'Melia a queer sense of comfort and well-being just to look at him, as though she herself had suddenly become well-fed, well-clothed, prosperous and clean. Her small, famished heart grew big and hot with wonder and love and worship.

Henry looked at her at last. It was such a familiar look that it did not hurt her—impatient, uneasy, resentful. She knew that people wanted to hit her when they looked like that.

" What a dirty little ragamuffin you are. Half-starved too. Why don't you wash your face ? "

" I do, 'Enry. But it ain't no good. It just comes again."

" What comes again ? You can't even speak English. It's disgusting. The way the lot of you have gone down hill makes me sick. What do you do with yourself all day ? "

' Melia faltered, and the question baffled her. What did she do that was worth repeating to such a man ?

" I dunno, 'Enry ; not much. There's the twins, and Ma—Ma gets took bad mostly every day, and—and a bit of charin' now that I don't 'ave to go to school no more, and—and——"

A rare light of inspiration flooded the wizened, unchildlike face. " And then there's the pantomime, 'Enry ! "

" What's that ? What pantomime ? "

" I dances—every evening—twice on Wednesdays and Saturdays. I'm six fairy. I've got a dress with green wings, and—and——" She stopped again. There was something in Henry's expression that choked her and wilted her frail joy. " Of course, they ain't real wings," she explained anxiously.

Henry muttered to himself. The word " half-wit " did not reach her, and if it had she would have hardly understood.

" In heaven's name how old are you ? " he asked.

" Fourteen, 'Enry—fourteen to-day."

" Good Lord ! You might—you might be anything."

'Melia nodded. It was the sort of thing people said, and she knew that it was true. She knew that she was not like other children. She was different—all wrong.

" I wish you'd get something decent to do—something respectable," Henry observed sullenly. " Pantomime dancing's beastly."

" I ain't good for much," she explained. " Mother says so."

He brooded over this, his hands deep in his pockets, his face grown suddenly very red.

" Well, you can't come round here, Amelia. It won't do. I'm clerk to Jenkyns and Smythe, and I'm getting on well. I shall have a rise soon. But it'll dish me if anybody knew—well, that I had—that you were my sister, and that's the truth."

" No one don't need to know, 'Enry."

" You'd tell them."

" I wouldn't, honour bright."

" You'd call me Henry."

" No, I wouldn't—I wouldn't really, 'Enry."

He relented a little, obviously relieved.

" Well, then, mind you don't. Get on with whatever you think you're doing here and clear out."

He pulled out a pile of papers and began to sort them with an air of profound preoccupation. But 'Melia lingered. She could not dust because everything she touched was left with a tell-tale smear, but also she could not go. She watched the young man as a dog watches a beloved master, and presently he looked up at her. His expression had changed. He was smiling awkwardly, shyly, like an embarrassed boy.

"Come here, Amelia Alexandria-what's-your-name." She came like a flash, and he pulled a lock of the straggling hair. "You're not a bad kid. Here, look at that. What do you think of her, eh?" He gave her the little piece of pasteboard with a repressed triumph which compared oddly with his previous hauteur. It made him seem younger and quite lovable. "Bit of all right, eh?"

'Melia's eyes and mouth grew round with wonder.

"She's a lidy, ain't she, 'Enry? And ain't she lovely—oh, 'Enry—beautifuller even than Cinderella."

He blushed, feigning good-natured indifference.

"Well, I don't know about that. But she's my girl. We're going to get spliced when I've saved a bit. Don't you tell anybody——"

Masculine voices sounded outside in the passage, and he thrust the photo in his pocket.

"There, you cut now. Remember what you promised—you might spoil everything." He was going to push her away, but his eyes met hers, and their wistful admiration and dumb appeal reached to some unknown, unexplored region of his heart. He kissed her gingerly on the cheek. "You're a queer little freak. There—and p'raps I'll bring Alice to see you dance—yes, I will really. And throw bouquets at you. And here's sixpence. Buy yourself something to eat, you look as though you wanted——"

He broke off. The door had opened before a large and portly gentleman, and Henry busied himself among his papers. No one saw 'Melia slip out. She was so small and quiet. She forgot Mrs. Pugmire and the tuppence and the spoiled duster. She ran down the street, her little legs shaking under her, and the sixpence clenched tight in a hot and grimy hand.

IV

THAT night Amelia Alexandria Nobbs danced as she had never danced before. Dancing was her one accomplishment, and even that was not so much an accomplishment as a queer disability to control the caperings of her thin little legs, which seemed to have a personality of their own, and to fly away with her whenever the band struck up. In her fairy dress and make-up her wizened unyouthfulness became an elfish piquancy, and she was put in the first row at the far end where people never failed to notice her. Good-natured matrons with their excited offspring pointed her out delightedly.

"Isn't she clever? Such a queer, sweet little mite. She can't be more than nine. I didn't know they were allowed to dance so young, but I expect they get a lot. And dancing's so healthy."

As a rule, 'Melia regarded the big theatre with a kind of fascinated terror. Though her small, tired brain could not reason about it, she was more conscious of the dust and dirt, the dark, narrow passages, the cursings and petty rages of the feverish inhabitants than of the lights and pretty clothes and gay music. The glitter did not dazzle her. It was not like the fire at daybreak, or like Henry. It was not real, or warm, or true. But to-night everything seemed different. Somewhere in that vast black gulf Henry might be seated—Henry and the kind-faced, beautiful being who was to be his wife. He was watching her. Perhaps he would be pleased. Perhaps even he might nudge his companion.

"You see that green fairy—the sixth in the first row—that's my sister."

She became so sure of it that when the conductor handed up a bouquet to a giggling and opulent-looking Cinderella she knew that there was some mistake, and smiled wistfully out into the darkness. And thereafter she danced more passionately than ever. Her legs surpassed themselves. They almost frightened her. She thought that they might go on for ever and ever. And her head felt so queer and light, as though it did not belong anywhere, but was floating about in the air, all by itself.

And whilst she danced, Mrs. Nobbs leant against the bar of the nearest public-house and told her tale.

"And there was me, suffering somethink awful, and wot does the varmint do? Buys itself bull's-eyes and comes 'ome with a lot of bloomin' lies. But I told 'er orf, I did. She won't forget the clout I gave 'er in a 'urry. Ain't as though I weren't a good mother. Look at me, waitin' 'ere to fetch 'er when she's done gallivanting at the theyater. Ain't many as'd do it. Little good-for-nothing!" She pushed her glass across the bar, and her husky voice grew suddenly clear and dominant. "But you should see my son 'Enry."

V

WINTER gave place to summer.

After the duster episode, 'Melia worked no more at Jenkins and Smythe's. So she never knew why these two otherwise estimable gentlemen should be so addicted to swearing, and Henry became a dream. She dreamed of him in the laundry where she worked by day and in the third rate music hall where at night she played a child's part in the tenth turn. She seemed, if anything, to have grown smaller. Her cheeks were colourless hollows; the little face tapered to a pointed, famished chin. Bu in her "make-up" she was still "elfish," and her terrifying little legs ran away with her more recklessly than ever.

Then, one hot August, something happened. At first 'Melia did not know what it was. It was like a great noise which meant nothing. She tried to understand, but her brain was full of the stifling steam of the laundry, the counting of shirts, and the tum-tum-tum of the orchestra. It did not seem to cope with anything else.

But she noticed things. For instance, Mrs. Nobbs's "attacks" suddenly took a turn for the better. She disappeared early in the morning and came home grimly sober. Mr. Nobbs brought home money and talked strangely of strange things. They moved into a better street, and the twins slept in a bed.

Then, one night, from the corner where she slept, 'Melia heard Mr. Nobbs's voice raised in bitter grief and anger.

"We've been driven back again. It ain't their fault, the fine lads, but there ain't enough of 'em. We shall want every man we've got. Gawd! why won't they 'ave me?"

"And 'Enry—'ave you 'eard?"

"Don't you worry, mother." He gave a short exultant laugh. "He's gone with the best, you can bet your life on that. They'll make a bloomin' orficer of 'im before you can say Jack Robinson. They'll want men like 'im. He'll do 'is bit—our 'Enry." He broke off, and 'Melia knew that he was looking at her, and she knew the look. "Gawd! if only them twins were grown or we had another son instead o' that," he muttered.

They talked far into the night, and 'Melia lay with closed eyes, still as a mouse, and listened. And now she began to understand.

A great and terrible thing had come to the world. It was a thing of fire, and brazen sound, and splendid, terrible colour. But she had no part—no share in it. It had no need of her. It needed everyone—even the twins—and, of course, Henry, but not Amelia Alexandria. It wouldn't have her at any cost.

Somehow or other it knew already that she was no good.

VI

SUDDENLY her unruly legs broke into a run. A minute before they had been so tired and wobbly that it seemed doubtful whether they would ever cover the distance between the laundry and home. And now they ran. A minute later they were marching—right-left, right-left, and 'Melias head was up and her chest out. The man beside her smiled good-naturedly. The drums went rat-a-tat-tat, "Keep in step there, 'Melia!" and the pipes shrieked, "Hurrah, hurrah! we're coming! Clear the way there!" It was a wonderful, amazing change. It was as though the grey October twilight had caught fire. Everything—everybody looked different. The streets shone and the veriest loafer stepped out with a devil-may-care air. Even 'Melia had a dangerous look about her. The heavy cloud which had rested on her small head, growing heavier and blacker every day, and making it so difficult for her to understand, lifted. She seemed to have broken through into clear sunlight.

At the cross-roads they parted company. The regiment went swinging on into the dusk, and 'Melia turned slowly into her own street. Gradually the sound of the pipes faded in the distanoe, and her heart beat slower, and her legs grew tired and wobbly and discouraged, as they did when the orchestra released them from its pitiless spell. By the time she had toiled to the top of the narrow wooden stairs of their home everything was dark and still and grey. And yet it was not quite as it had been. She felt shaken and bewildered, as though she had seen a light whose afterglow showed faintly on the gathering clouds.

She opened the door of the one room, which, in spite of better days, they still occupied. It was all dark and quiet. Mr. and Mrs. Nobbs were both on what they called "night-shift," and the twins had been given into the care of a kindly neighbour. But even on the threshold 'Melia felt that

there was something hidden in the darkness —something that had moved as she entered and now crouched motionless, watching her. She herself stood stock still, frozen with terror, until the sudden creak of a chair drove a little whistling breath between her clenched teeth. A man's figure shot up between her and the pale lightness of the window.

"Amelia, is that you? Don't cry out now, for heaven's sake. It's all right. It's me—Henry."

She did not answer. She heard him fumbling with matches, and presently by a flickering candle-light she saw him. He wore the same fine coat, and yet somehow it was fine no longer. And he was different. Or, perhaps, the poverty of the room threw its shadow over him, making him look thin and hunted and dishevelled. He stood there, trying to smile at her, and then it was as though a wire that held his face had snapped, letting his features fall into grotesque, pitiful lines. He turned away, tumbling into the chair by the empty grate, and the room was full of the terrible sound of a man crying.

In that moment Amelia Alexandria grew up. The shock of the incredible thing lifted her right out of the twilight in which she lived. She ran to him, pulling his hands from his face, calling to him, rubbing her sunken, grubby cheek against his wet one in inarticulate anguish and pity.

"Oh, 'Enry, don't you tike on like that! Don't you cry—please don't cry, 'Enry. You ain't got no call to cry. It'll be orl right. I'll make it orl right for you I will, honour bright."

He clung to her—that was the most incredible thing of all—he clung to her as though to the one sure, strong thing in a tottering universe. His head rested on her inadequate little shoulder, his trembling shook her as a storm shakes a frail young sapling. And she held him with an immense, sublimely confident power to save and comfort that came to her in his need. "Don't cry, 'Enry. Don't cry!"

He looked up at last, and in the sickly light his face showed wet and twisted and wry, like a broken-hearted child's.

"I—I'm not crying. I've had an awful time; I didn't know what to do. I—I've been prowling about; I didn't know where to go. I thought of chucking myself in the river. Where are they? Where's mother, and—and——"

"They're both out—workin'. They won't be back till mornin'."

His hands dropped limply from their desperate hold.

"I—I can wait a bit, then. I couldn't face them—they wouldn't understand. They've got ideas—about me. I only came because there was no one else—like a hunted rat——" He broke off, his teeth chattering. "Lord, how cold it is!"

She said nothing, but she began to lay the fire, and presently set the kettle over the smoky flame. She was outwardly just as usual—quiet and solemn—but inside her heart was beating with a sick fear. She could not think clearly, but she knew that something evil had laid its knife at the roots of the one thing that had grown straight and fine in their sunless, arid garden, their one little bit of glory and vision which they had clung to so stubbornly. From where she crouched on the fender she watched him, and under that dumb, anxious gaze he grew restless, and his laden, red-rimmed eyes met hers at last with a piteous resentment.

"What are you staring at? D'you think I'm a circus?"

"Oh, no, 'Enry."

"Don't do it. I can't stick it. I might be a god—a blessed tin god—and—and I'm all in—done for—broke—gone to blazes." He began to laugh hysterically, and he laughed till he buried his face in his shaking hands. She crept up to him and touched him tentatively like a timid, loving animal.

"Wot's up, 'Enry?"

"Money. You wouldn't understand."

"Yus, I would. I'd try to. I knows lots about money."

He looked at her dully. And suddenly he began—it was like the bursting of a pent-up torrent. He did not know whether she understood or not. The burden of it all had become too great. He was young, and as the faltering sentences fell from his lips they seemed to carry with them all his conceits and absurdities and leave the boy quivering and raw and broken.

"At first it was only a little—just a shilling or two—and when I won I paid it back—honest—and then a chap gave me a tip—a dead cert—and I borrowed—and lost. Then I had to get it back—I had to—but the brute went lame, and—and they've begun to suspect. I wanted to pay back out of my screw, but I haven't had time. They're going over my books to-morrow—they're hard men. If I can't square things

it means quod and there's Alice—no end proud. I know what she's thinking all the time. Why don't I join up and do my bit? And I would—I'd make good—but I can't now. I shan't have the chance."

She stood very straight.

"You'll 'ave to go, 'Enry. We ain't got enuf men. They—they've got to 'ave fellows like you, Dad says. They want you bad."

"They'll want me all right," he retorted.

"Is—is it an awful lot of money?"

"Five quid. It might as well be five thousand."

She was looking away from him, and the firelight in her eyes lent them an odd, elfish brightness.

"I've got five pounds, 'Enry."

"You? Go on!" He jeered savagely. "Don't tell lies."

"I 'ave. I saved it." She spoke very slowly and carefully. "Mother don't know. I kept it dark. I earn a lot at the 'all—'cause I can dance. I ain't got it 'ere. I keeps it with a friend. Five pounds it is."

He sprang up with a stifled oath.

"If that's true—if you'd only lend it me—you don't know what it means. I can't believe it, you queer little freak."

She had picked up the shabby hat from the floor where it had fallen.

"I gotter go now, 'Enry. There's the 'all at seven. I'll bring it when I comes back. You stay 'ere. No one'll know. It'll be orl right now."

He nodded, but he did not really hear what she had said—he was not thinking of her. His eyes shone, and he held himself with his old jauntiness. From the doorway she looked back at him. There was a world of unshaken love and wonder in that look, but he did not see it. He was thinking of all that life still held for him, and she turned and went on down the dark stairs.

The recruiting band was on its way home. Amelia Alexandria met it at the bottom of the street and marched with it to the rat-a-tat-tat of drums, and her head was up and her narrow chest thrown out. A newly-won soldier glanced down at her, and in the lamplight her small face looked so set and earnest that he laughed.

"Going to join up, eh?"

She shook her head.

"Oh, no; wouldn't 'ave me. I ain't no good." Her shrill little voice grew strong with a sudden joyous pride. "But I've got a big brother. 'E's going for a soldier to-morrow—'Enry is."

"Fine chap, your big brother!"

"Yus," she said simply. "'E's fine."

"I reckon you'd do your bit if you could, eh?"

The brave blare of the trumpets drowned her answer. Tears coming from she didn't know where burned in Amelia Alexandria's eyes, her grubby fists were clenched tight, and her heart grew big and hot.

For almost it seemed as though the great Thing had caught her up into itself, as though even she belonged a little——

VII

THE producer of the skit, "The Seven Chits," did not appear to hear, and when she said it all over again, a little louder and with a desperate quaver in her voice, he stared through a cloud of cigar smoke and laughed crossly.

"Five pounds advance? Rubbish! What next? No; certainly not! Ridiculous! The brat's mad! Chances are the show'll close down next week. Off with you!"

She held her ground. But there was nothing heroic or pathetic about her just then, nothing to touch the heart. Her sharp little nose was red, her cheeks were white under the grime, and she had a stupid, sullen look.

"I gotter 'ave it," she persisted dully. "I gotter—"

The producer arose majestically from his chair. Only on the stage or between the covers of a novel are want and disease really appealing. The average well-fed human being shrinks from their genuine manifestations as from something repulsive, and the producer was distinctly well-fed. He took Amelia Alexandria by the shoulder and propelled her out of the room and slammed the door viciously.

"Cheeky brat!"

The corridor was empty and in half darkness. The usual confusion and hubbub had momentarily died down, for it was the star turn, and every one who could, even to the blasé call-boy, had slipped away to the wings. In the solemn hush Amelia Alexandria heard a big, booming, woman's voice and the rumble of the orchestra.

"Come on, lads! We want the lot of you."

It was Flossie Montmorency singing her great recruiting song.

Amelia shuffled slowly along the passage. She was crying quietly, monotonously.

She was no good. Just for that one moment the chance had been in her hands. The Great Thing had looked at her and beckoned, " Come on, 'Melia ! Now then, do your bit ! " But now it was all gone. She was outside it all—the cheering and the singing and the giving were not for her. And there was Henry—their Henry whom England needed so badly—waiting.

A door stood open, letting out a yellow flood of light into the sombre passage. 'Melia Alexandria stood still. At first she was only fascinated, dazzled into forgetfulness, and then it was as though a shuttered window in her mind had been burst open.

" Come on, lads ! We want the lot——"

Apparently, Miss Montmorency suffered from the weakness of genius and a careless dresser. Her fur coat was on the floor, her dress had been flung anyhow over a chair ; there were shoes, stockings, hats everywhere. And on the table, glittering under the white electric glare, were silver brushes, bangles, rings—a gold bag.

Just for one instant Amelia waited. Then she went forward. She took no precautions. She did not look about her or listen. She was in the power of something bigger than herself—bigger than fear.

There were seven pound notes crumpled up in the gold bag. She counted out five with red-knuckled, shaking fingers. Right and wrong were only vague phantoms to Amelia Alexandria. She only knew of punishment and reward. She had to choose between them—no, simpler than that—between herself and Henry—between nothing and everything.

She turned suddenly. A figure had loomed up in the open doorway—a portly dumbfounded figure. In the distance Miss Montmorency's hefty contralto vaulted the high " E " amidst tumultuous applause. Just for an instant the two stared at each other. And then a strange thing happened. 'Melia, the timid, the cowed, the broken, gathered herself together like some wild thing of the forests. She made no sound. She flung herself at the enemy—a tiger-cat springing in the face of an unwieldy, puzzled elephant —and the elephant stepped back, and the way was open.

Amelia Alexandria fled. For the last time the amazing, incalculable legs answered to the call—carrying her to victory . . .

Henry Nobbs waited for her at the head of the stairs. He took the paper money from her clenched hand and counted it in the dark. She was leaning against the wall and he could not see her. He did not know that she could hardly stand. She hushed the agonised, panting lungs with the last effort of her will.

But a minute later he picked her up. He kissed her affectionately on both clammy cheeks.

" You've done it, 'Melia. You saved me. You're the best little sister a fellow ever had. And I'll pay you back. I'll fight like ten men just to make you proud of me again. I'll bring you back something fine." He laughed out joyously. " Perhaps a German helmet."

And then he kissed her again and set her down, and a moment later was gone.

Amelia Alexandria listened to his retreating steps. She heard his cheery, farewell shout. Then the cloud which had lifted for so long from her tired, bewildered brain, rolled back again, shutting out the thought of him. The amazing legs gave way suddenly and completely. It grew very dark—darker than night.

They found her there when they came to look for her, lying in a little unconscious heap half-way up the stairs.

VIII

AFTER that life resolved itself into a series of pictures for Amelia Alexandria. It was like sitting in a picture-palace. A film would be thrown on the screen showing strange places and strange people, and then everything would fade into darkness, and after a while another scene would come along. Amelia supposed it all meant something, but she wasn't sure.

One scene showed up clearer than the rest. It represented a big, glass-domed room, lined with benches, on which a swarm of solemn, black-coated gentry bobbed up and down with a tremendous enthusiasm. And extra large policemen, looking somehow as though they were in church and quite human, kept order. 'Melia had never seen a policeman without his helmet, and the phenomenon filled her with awe and helped to keep her awake. For there was a musty-fusty, sleepy smell about the place, and the light, dim and foggy, seemed to have been in prison all its life and to have lost heart.

Opposite 'Melia, on a bench higher than the rest and barricaded by a sinister-looking

desk, sat an old, old man. He was quite alone. He looked at 'Melia and 'Melia looked at him. She had a dim idea that there was some sort of relationship between them. They had set her on a tall stool so that she could see him better over the bars. And she, too, was all alone.

There was only one familiar face among the many. In a queer, box-shaped structure like a pulpit stood Miss Florence Montmorency, and, with tossing plumes and jangling jewels, gave her opinion to the world. In vain the old man tried to stem the torrent, it caught his protest like a straw and flung it aside.

" It's a shame, your Worship, a downright, blinking shame ! If I'd known it was that poor, little, half-starved brat I wouldn't have said a word. What's five quid to me, anyhow ? I said I didn't want to prosecute. I told that silly mug of a bobby I wouldn't, and what's more, I won't."

She paused for breath and the old man leant forward.

" Did you take the five pounds ? " he asked in his tired, far-away voice.

" Say you didn't ! " urged Miss Montmorency. " I'll back you ! Don't let yourself be bullied, kiddo ! "

" Yus," said 'Melia, drowsily. " I took it."

" For food ? "

" Yus."

" And quite right too ! A jolly good thing. I'd have done it myself——"

Somehow or other Miss Montmorency was whisked out of the picture, and in her place Mrs. Nobbs loomed up, red-faced with wrath and righteous indignation and other things.

" 'Tain't as though I 'adn't been a good mother. Slaved my life away for the ungrateful brat, I 'ave, and orl she does is to bring shame on me grey hairs. Never was no good—not to anybody." Mrs. Nobbs began to sniff. " If it wasn't for me son 'Enry wot's gone to serve 'is King and Country——"

She faded. A murmur of voices. Here and there a word rose up out of the dimness and confusion like a fish flashing to the surface of a pond. " Starved, malnutrition, not responsible, wasting, not long——"

The old man and the child looked at each other as though there were some secret bond between them.

" You must try to be a good girl, Amelia."

Someone lifted her gently from her perch. But now there was no orchestra, no jolly marching band to call them to their duty, and the legs wobbled and gave way. One of the extra big policemen loomed over her. She saw his round, red face—it seemed to blot out everything else—and she was filled with wonder.

It had never occurred to her that policemen cried.

The black-coated, solemn-looking folk whispered together. The old man bent over his papers. A shrill voice rose up from somewhere in the background.

" 'Ardened little monkey ! Gawd knows where she got it from—not me, any'ow. Poor, but honest, that's wot we are. And there's 'Enry, chucked 'is job to do 'is bit. Gawd be thanked 'e need never know ; it'd break 'is 'eart, poor chap—a sister like that. Wot's that ? Well, ain't I goin' quiet ? "

The voice faded into the distance.

IX

THE nurse paused with her hand on the half-opened door and looked back over her shoulder. She had flushed up suddenly and her lips were not quite steady.

" She will be so happy," she said. " She is always talking of you. We read her the bits out of the papers, and—and she was so proud." As she spoke her eyes sank to the level of the patch of purple ribbon on his left breast. She was thinking how strange it was that 'Melia Alexandria should have such a brother, and of the many wonderful things that war brings in its train. So she did not see the young man's face.

" I would have come before. I didn't know, they never told me. They wanted to keep it from me."

The nurse understood that quite well. A hero and a common little street girl who stole ! But her heart was tender.

" You mustn't be hard on her. She has had a bad time, and I don't think she quite understood, and—and I'm afraid it won't be for long now."

The young man laughed. It was a very ugly little laugh, the kind that comes from someone who is badly hurt.

" No ; I shan't be hard."

It was a big room and 'Melia slept in a far corner by the window, and a screen guarded her from her companions. The other children would grow quiet when they looked at the screen. It seemed to frighten them.

But behind it there was only Amelia Alexandria, and she was so small. She seemed to have grown smaller and to be part of the whiteness of the little white bed. Her dark head was like a faded flower whose stem has been broken.

She was asleep, but when he knelt down beside her she opened her eyes and smiled at him as though he had been with her all the time.

" 'Allo, 'Enry ! "

He tried to speak. All the things that he had meant to say slipped away from him. Something there was about Amelia Alexandria which made him feel helpless and young and foolish. She had grown up —she had grown wise—she was looking at him and at life from a serene height. And suddenly he was the child who needed comforting. He hid his face in his hands, and she put a thin arm about him, holding him close.

" Don't take on 'Enry. I'm orl right. You wasn't to know nothink—no one was to know."

" They're going to know now. I'm going to get you out of here. You're coming home with me. I'm married. I've told Alice. I'm going to tell everyone."

" Wot cher goin' to tell them ? "

" What you did. What I am."

She smiled vaguely, wistfully.

" I likes being 'ere, 'Enry. They're that good to me. I get things to eat, and I lie 'ere all day, like a princess, and sometimes Miss Flossie comes and brings me choc'lates." Her thin voice grew clear and joyous. " And she tells me about you, 'Enry ; 'ow you took the trench and all them Germans. I likes that best. But I don't say nothink—I promised you I wouldn't—you a real live horficer and me—It'd spoil everything if they knew."

" Don't, 'Melia, for God's sake ! "

" My, ain't cher fine, 'Enry ! A real man ! I like that better than the coat with skirts ; and then, the bit o' ribbon." She passed her ghostly hands over him as though to make sure of his reality. " The King gave you that, didn't 'e ? "

" Yes, yes ; perhaps he wouldn't have if he had known. He's going to know now. 'Melia, why did you do it ? It wasn't right —I wasn't worth it. Why did you do it ? "

She tried to answer. The little flame of life that had sprung up for a last time was burning very low. Her head rested wearily against his shoulder.

" Don't you tell, 'Enry."

" I must. I've got to get you out of here."

" I don't want to. I likes it. Things to eat and no twins. 'Enry, if you tells them it's all been no good, then I ain't done nothink. I was that 'appy. You gotter promise."

" I can't. I'm blackguard enough."

" You ain't, you—you're an 'ero. The King said so. My, ain't it getting dark, though."

" Is it ? Yes, perhaps——"

" Tell me about them trenches, 'Enry. Was there a band playin' ? "

" No, no band."

" There was a band—that night. I likes bands—'elps you to do things. A soldier, 'e said ; 'You'd do your bit, too, if you could wouldn't cher, 'Melia ? ' 'E seemed sort of to know I was going to 'ave a chance."

" A chance ! What chance ? "

" 'Melia ain't no good for nothink ; Dad said."

He was beginning to understand. It was as though he had caught a glimpse of a small, tired soul that had struggled its way up out of a sordid gloom into the light. He held her close, desperately close.

" It's going to be all right now, 'Melia."

" You won't tell, 'Enry ? "

" No, not if you don't want it."

" Then—p'raps—I'll 'ave done somethin' —after all——"

" Yes, something fine ; the bravest thing——"

Her smile was a little scornful.

" Tell me about them trenches, 'Enry."

He drew a deep unsteady breath. But he spoke with a ringing clearness. She was slipping from him, but before she went she was to know what she had won.

" They were enfilading our men—shooting them down from the side, like this —and two other chaps and I went for them. There was only one gun—a machine-gun—but they bowled over the other two before we got near, and then—then I just bombed them out."

" How fine ! Wot cher cryin' for, 'Enry."

" I'm not crying. Then the King gave me this medal. And he said : ' You take this along to your sister Amelia Alexandria, and give it to her with my love. For she's made a man of you, and she's done her bit with the bravest of them all."

" G'arn ! "

" So it's yours, 'Melia, you won it ;

it's your very own. Can you read? It's got 'For Valour' written on it."

"Wot's—wot's valour?"

"What you're made of."

Her hand closed tight over the simple bronze cross. Her face was radiant, but her eyes had a blank unseeing look.

"Ain't it dark? Must be gettin' on for night. I think I could sleep a bit now, 'Enry. I'm that 'appy."

He stayed with her, her head on his shoulder, but she did not wake again. She slept on all through the night, and when they came to her in the first flush of the morning she was still sleeping. Her small face had a look of such ineffable content that the children were allowed to peep at her. And after that they were not afraid or sorry any more.

They knew there was no need.

The Monk

THE monk, as I judged from the break in his tonsure, a few scattered white hairs upon his temples being all that remained of it, might be about seventy—but from his eyes, and that sort of fire which was in them, which seemed more tempered by courtesy than years, could be no more than sixty—Truth might lie between—He was certainly sixty-five; and the general air of his countenance, notwithstanding something seemed to have been planting wrinkles in it before their time, agreed to the account.

It was one of those heads which Guido has often painted—mild, pale—penetrating, free from all common-place ideas of fat contented ignorance looking downwards upon the earth—it looked forwards; but looked as if it looked at something beyond this world. How one of his order came by it, Heaven above, who let it fall upon a monk's shoulders, best knows; but it would have suited a Bramin, and had I met it upon the plains of Indostan, I had reverenced it . . .

When he had entered the room three paces, he stood still; and laying his left hand upon his breast (a slender white staff which with he journeyed being in his right)—when I had got close up to him, he introduced himself with the little story of the wants of his convent, and the poverty of his order—and did it with so simple a grace—and such an air of deprecation was there in the whole cast of his look and figure—I was bewitched not to have been struck with it—

—A better reason was, I had predetermined not to give him a single sous . . .

My heart smote me the moment he shut the door—Psha! said I, with an air of carelessness, three several times—but it would not do: every ungracious syllable I had uttered crowded back into my imagination: I reflected, I had no right over the poor Franciscan, but to deny him; and that the punishment of that was enough to the disappointed, without the addition of unkind language—I considered his grey hairs—his courteous figure seemed to re-enter and gently ask me what injury he had done me?—and why I could use him thus?—I would have given twenty livres for an advocate—I have behaved very ill, said I within myself; but I have only just set out upon my travels; and shall learn better manners as I get along.

LAURENCE STERNE.

Scotland in Verse

O CALEDONIA! stern and wild,
Meet nurse for a poetic child!
Land of brown heath and shaggy wood,
Land of the mountain and the flood,
Land of my sires! What mortal hand
Can e'er untie the filial band,
That unites me to thy rugged strand!
Still, as I view each well-known scene,
Think what is now, and what hath been,
Seems as, to me, of all bereft,
Sole friends thy woods and streams were left;
And thus I love them better still,
Ev'n in extremity of ill.

SIR WALTER SCOTT.

O SCOTIA! my dear, my native soil!
For whom my warmest wish to Heaven is sent;
Long may thy hardy sons of rustic toil
Be blest with health, and peace, and sweet content;
And, oh may Heaven their simple lives prevent
From Luxury's contagion, weak and vile;
Then howe'er crowns and coronets be rent,
A virtuous populace may rise the while,
And stand a wall of fire around their much-loved isle.

ROBERT BURNS.

DOOL and wae for the order sent our lads to the Border!
The English for once, by guile won the day;—
The Flowers of the Forest, that focht aye the foremost—
The prime of our land—are cauld in the clay.

We'll hear noe mair lilting at the ewe-milking,
Women and bairns are heartless and wae,
Sighing and moaning on ilka green leaning—
The Flowers of the Forest are a' wede away.

JEAN ELLIOT.

FROM the lone shieling of the misty island
Mountains divide us, and a waste of seas;
Yet still the blood is warm, the heart is Highland
And we in dreams behold the Hebrides.

JOHN WILSON.

IT'S hame, and it's hame, hame fain wad I be,
An' it's hame, hame, hame, to my ain countree!
When the flower is i' the bud and the leaf is on the tree,
The lark shall sing me hame in my ain countree;
It's hame, and it's hame, hame fain wad I be,
An' it's hame, hame, hame, to my ain countree.

ALLAN CUNNINGHAM.

The Love of Ulrich Nebendahl

It was surely a beautiful thing, this love

By JEROME K. JEROME

PERHAPS of all, it troubled most the Herr Pfarrer. Was he not the father of the village? And as such did it not fall to him to see his children marry well and suitably?—marry in any case. It was the duty of every worthy citizen to keep alive throughout the ages the sacred hearth fire, to rear up sturdy lads and honest lassies that would serve God, and the Fatherland. A true son of the Saxon soil was the Herr Pastor Winckelmann—kindly, simple, sentimental.

"Why, at your age, Ulrich—at your age," repeated the Herr Pastor, setting down his beer and wiping with the back of his hand his large uneven lips, "I was the father of a family—two boys and a girl. You never saw her, Ulrich; so sweet, so good. We called her Maria." The Herr Pfarrer sighed and hid his broad red face behind the raised cover of his pewter pot.

"They must be good fun in the house, the little ones," commented Ulrich, gazing upward with his dreamy eyes at the wreath of smoke ascending from his long-stemmed pipe. "The little ones, always my heart goes out to them."

"Take to yourself a wife," urged the Herr Pfarrer. "It is your duty. The good God has given to you ample means. It is not right that you should lead this lonely life. Bachelors make old maids; things of no use."

"That is so," Ulrich agreed. "I have often said the same unto myself. It would be pleasant to feel one was not working merely for oneself."

"Elsa, now," went on the Herr Pfarrer, "she is a good child, pious, and economical. The price of such is above rubies."

Ulrich's face lightened with a pleasant smile. "Aye, Elsa is a good girl," he answered. "Her little hands—have you ever noticed them, Herr Pastor—so soft and dimpled?"

The Herr Pfarrer pushed aside his empty pot and leaned his elbows on the table.

"I think—I do not think—she would say no. Her mother, I have reason to believe——. Let me sound them—discreetly." The old pastor's red face glowed redder yet with pleasurable anticipation; he was a born matchmaker.

But Ulrich the wheelwright shuffled in his chair uneasily.

"A little longer," he pleaded. "Let me think it over. A man should not marry without first being sure he loves. Things might happen. It would not be fair to the maiden."

The Herr Pfarrer stretched his hand across the table and laid it upon Ulrich's arm.

"It is Hedwig; twice you walked home with her last week."

"It is a lonesome way for a timid maiden; and there is the stream to cross," explained the wheelwright.

For a moment the Herr Pastor's face had clouded, but now it cleared again.

"Well, well, why not? Elsa would have been better in some respects, but Hedwig—ah, yes, she, too, is a good girl; a little wild perhaps—it will wear off. Have you spoken with her?"

"Not yet."

"But you will?"

Again there fell that troubled look into those dreamy eyes. This time it was Ulrich who, laying aside his pipe, rested his great arms upon the wooden table.

"Now, how does a man know when he is in love?" asked Ulrich of the Pastor, who, having been married twice, should surely be experienced upon the point. "How should he be sure that it is this woman and no other to whom his heart has gone out?"

A commonplace-looking man was the Herr Pastor, short and fat and bald. But there had been other days, and these had left to him a voice that still was young; and the evening twilight screening the seared face, Ulrich heard but the pastor's voice, which was the voice of a boy.

"She will be dearer to you than yourself. Thinking of her, all else will be as nothing. For her you would lay down your life."

They sat in silence for a while; for the fat little Herr Pfarrer was dreaming of the past; and long, lanky, Ulrich Nebendahl, the wheelwright, of the future.

That evening, as chance would have it, Ulrich, returning to his homestead—a rambling mill beside the river, where he dwelt alone with ancient Anna—met Elsa of the dimpled hands upon the bridge that spans the murmuring Mühlde, and talked a while with her, and said good-night.

How sweet it had been to watch her ox-like eyes shyly seeking his, to press her dimpled hand and feel his own great strength. Surely he loved her better than he did himself. There could be no doubt of it. He pictured her in trouble, in danger from the savage soldiery that came and went like evil shadows through these pleasant Saxon valleys, leaving death and misery behind them: burnt homesteads; wild-eyed women, hiding their faces from the light. Would he not for her sake give his life?

So it was made clear to him that little Elsa was his love.

Until next morning, when, raising his eyes from the whirling saw, there stood before him Margot, laughing Margot, mischief-loving, wayward, that would ever be to him the baby he had played with, nursed, and comforted. Margot weary! Had he not a thousand times carried her sleeping in his arms. Margot in danger! At the mere thought his face flushed an angry scarlet.

All that afternoon Ulrich communed with himself, tried to understand himself, and could not. For Elsa and Margot and Hedwig were not the only ones by a long way. What girl in the village did he not love, if it came to that? Liesel, who worked so hard and lived so poorly, bullied by her cross-grained grand-dam. Susanna, plain and a little crotchety, who had never had a sweetheart to coax the thin lips into smiles. The little ones—for so they seemed to long, lanky Ulrich, with their pleasant ways—Ulrich smiled as he thought of them—how should a man love one more than another?

The Herr Pfarrer shook his head and sighed.

"That is not love. Gott in Himmel! think what it would lead to! The good God never would have arranged things so. You love one; she is the only woman in the world for you."

"But you, yourself, Herr Pastor, you have twice been married," suggested the puzzled wheelwright.

"But one at a time, Ulrich—one at a time. That is a very different thing."

Why should it not come to him, alone among men? Surely it was a beautiful thing, this love; a thing worthy of a man, without which a man was but a useless devourer of food, cumbering the earth.

So Ulrich pondered, pausing from his work one drowsy summer's afternoon, listening to the low song of the waters. How well he knew the winding Mühlde's merry voice. He had worked beside it, played beside it all his life. Often he would sit and talk to it as to an old friend, reading answers in its changing tones.

Trudchen, seeing him idle, pushed her cold nose into his hand. Trudchen just now was feeling clever and important. Was she not the mother of the five most wonderful puppies in all Saxony? They swarmed about his legs, pressing him with their little foolish heads. Ulrich stooped and picked up one in each big hand. But this causing jealousy and heartburning, laughing, he lay down upon a log. Then the whole five stormed over him, biting his hair, trampling with their clumsy paws upon his face; till suddenly they raced off in a body to attack a floating feather. Ulrich sat up and watched them, the little rogues, the little foolish, helpless things, that called for so much care. A mother thrush twittered above his head. Ulrich rose, and, creeping on tiptoe, peeped into the nest. But the mother bird, casting one glance towards him, went on with her work. Whoever was afraid of Ulrich the wheelwright! The tiny murmuring insects buzzed to and fro about his feet. An old man, passing to his evening rest, gave him "good day." A zephyr whispered something to the leaves, at which they laughed, then passed upon his way. Here and there a shadow crept out from its hiding-place.

"If only I could marry the whole village!" laughed Ulrich to himself. "But that, of course, is nonsense!"

The spring that followed let loose the dogs of war again upon the blood-stained land, for now all Germany, taught late by common suffering forgetfulness of local rivalries, was rushing together in a mighty

wave that would sweep French feet for ever from their hold on German soil. Ulrich, for whom the love of woman seemed not, would at least be the lover of his country. He, too, would march among those brave stern hearts that, stealing like a thousand riverlets from every German valley, were flowing north and west to join the Prussian eagles.

¶

BUT even love of country seemed denied to Ulrich of the dreamy eyes. His wheelwright's business had called him to a town far off. He had been walking all the day. Towards evening, passing the outskirts of a wood, a feeble cry for help, sounding from the shadows, fell upon his ear. Ulrich paused, and again from the sombre wood crept that weary cry of pain. Ulrich ran and came at last to where, among the wild flowers and the grass, lay prone five human figures. Two of them were of the German Landwehr, the other three Frenchmen in the hated uniform of Napoleon's famous scouts. It had been some unimportant "affair of outposts," one of those common incidents of warfare that are never recorded —never remembered save here and there by some sad face unnoticed in the crowd. Four of the men were dead; one, a Frenchman, was still alive though bleeding copiously from a deep wound in the chest that with a handful of dank grass he was trying to staunch.

Ulrich raised him in his arms. The man spoke no German, and Ulrich knew but his mother tongue; but when the man, turning towards the neighbouring village with a look of terror in his half-glazed eyes, pleaded with his hands, Ulrich understood, and lifting him gently carried him further into the wood.

He found a small deserted shelter that had been made by charcoal burners, and there on a bed of grass and leaves Ulrich laid him; and there for a week all but a day Ulrich tended him and nursed him back to life, coming and going stealthily like a thief in the darkness. Then Ulrich, who had thought his one desire in life to be to kill all Frenchmen, put food and drink into the Frenchman's knapsack and guided him half through the night and took his hand; and so they parted.

Ulrich did not return to Alt Waldnitz, that lies hidden in the forest beside the murmuring Mühlde. They would think he had gone to the war; he would let them think so. He was too great a coward to go back to them and tell them that he no longer wanted to fight; that the sound of the drum brought to him only the thought of trampled grass where dead men lay with curses in their eyes.

So, with head bowed down in shame, to and fro about the moaning land, Ulrich of the dreamy eyes came and went, guiding his solitary footsteps by the sounds of sorrow, driving away the things of evil where they crawled among the wounded, making his way swiftly to the side of pain, heedless of the uniform.

Thus one day he found himself by chance near again to forest-girdled Waldnitz. He would push his way across the hills, wander through its quiet ways in the moonlight while the good folks all lay sleeping. His footsteps quickened as he drew nearer. Where the trees broke he would be able to look down upon it, see every roof he knew so well—the church, the mill, the winding Mühlde—the green, worn grey with dancing feet, where, when the hateful war was over, would be heard again the Saxon folk-songs.

Another was there, where the forest halts on the brow of the hill—a figure kneeling on the ground with his face towards the village. Ulrich stole closer. It was the Herr Pfarrer, praying volubly but inaudibly. He scrambled to his feet as Ulrich touched him, and his first astonishment over, poured forth his tale of woe.

There had been trouble since Ulrich's departure. A French corps of observation had been camped upon the hill, and twice within the month had a French soldier been found murdered in the woods. Heavy had been the penalties exacted from the village, and terrible had been the Colonel's threats of vengeance. Now, for a third time, a soldier stabbed in the back had been borne into camp by his raging comrades, and this very afternoon the Colonel had sworn that if the murderer were not handed over to him within an hour from dawn, when the camp was to break up, he would before marching burn the village to the ground. The Herr Pfarrer was on his way back from the camp where he had been to plead for mercy, but it had been in vain.

"Such are foul deeds!" said Ulrich.

"The people are mad with hatred of the French," answered the Herr Pastor. "It may be one, it may be a dozen who have

taken vengeance into their own hands. May God forgive them."

"They will not come forward—not to save the village?"

"Can you expect of them! There is no hope for us; the village will burn as a hundred others have burned."

Aye, that was true; Ulrich had seen their blackened ruins; the old sitting with white faces among the wreckage of their homes, the little children wailing round their knees, the tiny broods burned in their nests. He had picked their corpses from beneath the charred trunks of the dead elms.

The Herr Pfarrer had gone forward on his melancholy mission to prepare the people for their doom.

Ulrich stood alone, looking down upon Alt Waldnitz bathed in moonlight. And there came to him the words of the old pastor: "She will be dearer to you than yourself. For her you would lay down your life." And Ulrich knew that his love was the village of Alt Waldnitz, where dwelt his people, the old and wrinkled, the laughing "little ones," where dwelt the helpless dumb things with their deep pathetic eyes, where the bees hummed drowsily, and the thousand tiny creatures of the day.

¶

THEY hanged him high upon a withered elm, with his face towards Alt Waldnitz that all the village, old and young, might see; and then to the beat of drum and scream of fife they marched away; and forest-hidden Waldnitz gathered up once more its many threads of quiet life and wove them into homely pattern.

They talked and argued many a time, and some there were who praised and some who blamed. But the Herr Pfarrer could not understand.

Until years later a dying man unburdened his soul so that the truth became known.

Then they raised Ulrich's coffin reverently, and the young men carried it into the village and laid it in the churchyard that it might always be among them. They reared above him what in their eyes was a grand monument, and carved upon it:

"Greater love hath no man than this."

The Wine of Life

FRIENDSHIP'S a noble name, 'tis love refined. MRS. CENTLIVRE.

THE only way to have a friend is to be one. EMERSON.

WHILE in my senses I shall find nothing preferable to a pleasant friend. HORACE.

WHAT is the odds so long as the fire of souls is kindled at the taper of conviviality, and the wing of friendship never moults a feather? (Dick Swiveller) CHARLES DICKENS.

FRIENDSHIP excels kinship. CICERO.

IF he be not fellow with the best king, thou shalt find the best king of good fellows. SHAKESPEARE.

CHANGE your pleasures, but do not change your friends. VOLTAIRE.

A CROWD is not company and faces are but a gallery of pictures. BACON.

FRIENDS are not so easily made as kept. LORD HALIFAX.

FLATTERY is the natural language o' freenship. JOHN WILSON.

BEST company consists of five persons. STEELE.

IF you would be loved as a companion, avoid unnecessary criticism upon those with whom you live. SIR A. HELPS.

A BROTHER is a friend given by nature. J. B. LEGOUVÉ.

TO LOVE the peaceable and domestic life it is necessary to have known it; one must have felt its sweetnesses in childhood. ROUSSEAU.

A FRIEND is worth all hazards we can run. YOUNG.

Me-Lee of The North

Of a lonely man who found peace

By JAMES OLIVER CURWOOD

TOM CRAIG looked like a worn-out business man when he came up into the North country, though he was not much past thirty. There were little lines and a tense look about his mouth, and a wistful sickness in his clear grey eyes—eyes that were almost too clear.

He seemed to have no business, and neither did he appear to be on a holiday for his health. Wherever he went, people looked a bit more closely at him than at ordinary men, for there was a certain fighting shyness about him, an aloofness, a nervous desire to be alone that was unnatural, and which, with the strange clearness of his eyes, attracted attention.

Some guessed instinctively that he was grappling with something which was not disease, for he bore none of the signs of physical blight; others wondered; many talked. But Tom Craig confided in no one. The few words he exchanged with those about him were no more than the strictest courtesy demanded.

He watched people closely, especially women, and there were a few who noticed that a strange smile, which might have been of irony or contempt, crept subtly about his lips when he was looking at the other sex. The clerk in the King Edward, at North Bay, observed this most closely, and made his guess.

Craig remained at North Bay for a month and then went on to Sudbury. He visited the nickel and silver mines and looked over a few claims, but with no idea of investing. A dozen times he dropped off at wilderness stations along the line of the Canadian Pacific between Sudbury and Port Arthur, and wherever he stopped people soon came to ask themselves why he had stopped.

For six months he drifted slowly westward, lying over for nine hours at Blind Indian River, that he might pass through Winnipeg in the night. Early in the autumn he got off at Regina, walked directly to the office of the Commissioner of the Royal North-West Mounted Police, and showed that most important person in the province a letter which gained for him an audience that lasted for more than an hour.

When the two came from the commissioner's private office, the Big man shook hands with him, spoke a few low words, and Craig was a "rookie" in the the force. He spent three weeks in barracks learning to ride and shoot, and was then detailed to a patrol that was on the lookout for cattle thieves in the prairie country. He straightened up. The tired and worn expression left his face. He rode hard, and his muscles toughened. But the look of age, the look of a strange sickness, still haunted far back in the depths of his eyes.

Late in the winter he was transferred with a corporal, to a new post that had been established at the headwaters of the Grey Beaver, two hundred miles straight north of civilization, in the Reindeer Lake country, west of Hudson's Bay. There was a little cabin freshly built, and in this he and Corporal Scottie MacTabb lived alone, patrolling the wild country north, west, and east of them for a hundred miles or more.

When the first days of spring came, Scottie McTabb knew this much about him: His name was Thomas Craig. He had been in the service nine months. He was an Englishman, and before he came into the North he had been a doctor. Scottie learned this when he was down with a fever. There is small joy in living alone with a man as uncommunicative as a clam, two hundred miles from the last outpost, and the monotony of it began to wear on Scottie.

But one day there came a change which was dynamic in its suddenness. Craig set out on a two-days' trip north-west. It was a different man who returned. There was lustre in his eyes. His cheeks

were filled with a new flush; his voice was different; his step was different; the grip of his hand was different, when he greeted Scottie McTabb. The little Scotch corporal waited, conjecturing at this new spirit, and it was while he was frying bacon for supper that the thing came out.

"Scottie," said Craig, puffing hard at his pipe, "I hit the outlet of Silver Fox Creek coming back. It's not more than ten miles from here, is it?"

"About that," said Scottie.

"There's a Frenchman—a trapper—lives there. His name is Croisset, and he's married to an Englishwoman. He's a half-breed—small, and as black as an Indian. Know anything about 'em?"

"No."

Craig rose to his feet and paced back and forth across the cabin, puffing out volumes of blue smoke.

"They've got a girl," he said at last, and there was a curious tremble in his voice. "She ran in while I was there, with her arms full of red *bakneesh*. I didn't notice anything much except her eyes and her hair. I've dreamed of such eyes, but I've never seen them before. She's about eighteen, I guess—a wild-flower of the forests, with her hair in a great long braid——"

He laughed a little confusedly.

"She struck me as being very pretty," he finished.

Scottie straightened and looked at Craig.

"She's more than that, isn't she, Craig?" he asked, laughing. "Come to think of it, I believe I do know something about them. There was a breed lived down on the Beaver two years ago, with an English wife, and they used to talk about his girl at the post. A raving beauty, that's what she was. Her name was Marie."

"Yes," said Craig quietly, "her name is Marie."

Scottie almost allowed the bacon to burn in his astonishment.

"You don't say!" he gasped. Then he laughed, and winked broadly at his companion. "I'm glad they've moved up near us, Tom. That little girl will do you good. That's what you need to make you sociable—a woman."

He was about to turn when the look that shot into Craig's face held him.

"She's only a girl—a little girl," he said; and there was that haunting repressiveness in his voice and manner again that irritated Scottie McTabb. He put down his bacon and stood over Craig, his blue eyes firing up with sudden determination.

"Look here, Craig," he demanded gently, "you've got to come out with it! You're hiding things from me, do you understand? If you are a murderer, out with it, and I'll help you. You ain't agreeable, and it's because there's something on your mind. I'm not curious. I don't give a cuss for other people's secrets. But why not let me in on this? Company's good for one, you know. It might help. Open out now. What's up?"

His hand dropped on Craig's shoulder, and a yearning crept into Craig's eyes. Scottie was the first to speak in that way. There was comradeship in the little Scotsman's eyes.

Craig's face flushed as he answered.

"I believe it—would help," he said, slowly. "Anyway, it will help to excuse me for being so beastly out of sorts. You see, Scottie—old man—it's one of those things a man thinks he ought to keep to himself. It's just the oldest—and the newest—story on earth: a woman, the other man—the crash. The plot is nearly always the same, with only a few variations. Sometimes there's a scandal, a murder, or a suicide. The fourth variation is when a man doesn't make a fool of himself. I didn't. Understand?"

"Yes," said Scottie, but he went on, relentlessly: "She was your wife?"

"Yes."

Scottie's hand tightened on the other's shoulder.

"Let's hear about it."

"It's brief," said Craig, "because there's nothing new. I was a doctor, with a fair practice, and my fortune to make. And she—she was just what you called the little girl over there—a beauty. We were happy, almost like a couple of kids, until we moved to a bigger city. And then—maybe you can understand it, Scottie—she was so beautiful that she began to attract attention, and she came to like it. Automobiles, fine clothes, dreams I couldn't materialize, a few parties, and then the other man and his pile of money. When I found it out I wiped the slate clean, perhaps a little too quietly. That was two years ago. Six months after I left, she had her divorce, and they

were married. They were in Paris the last I heard."

"Any children?" asked Scottie.

"No."

The little corporal drew Craig to his feet and pulled him out through the door into the day that was fading into night. The smells of spring were in the air. The fat poplar buds were bursting. From the top of their ridge they could look down upon miles and miles of the quiet wilderness. For a moment Scottie pointed, without speaking. There came to them the distant mooing of a bull moose, calling for a mate; behind them, in a dense clump of black spruce, an owl chortled in sleepy awakening. There was something of majestic peace in the day's end. Craig felt his lungs filling with the pure air, and the glory of the solitudes filled his soul with a strange rest even before Scottie spoke.

"See what you've come to, Tom," he said at last. "I was worse than you when I came up here, for I was dying of bad lungs. Look! Isn't it glorious? You've got *that*, and she—why, she's gone to blazes," he said simply.

For an instant Craig's hand clenched. But there was a touch of a brother in Scottie's hand as he said:

"Let's go in and finish the bacon."

II

LATER, Craig went out alone, and smoked. The confession that he had made to Scottie, the revelation of heartache that he had sworn to keep to himself, had already helped him, as the little corporal had predicted. But he knew that after a while he would regret having made that confession, for Scottie would see less and less of manhood in him now if he did not straighten up, like a tree that has been bent and twisted by storm, and face life anew. For Scottie could not understand, no man could understand, and he was already sorry that he had weakened.

What if he should tell Scottie that in his bitterest hours he could not bring himself to see the woman as she was, but always as she had been once upon a time in a fairyland of long ago? Scottie would call him a fool.

He saw her again to-night, as he had seen her a thousand times in his wanderings, back in the little village where paradise had opened its gates to him. He saw again the glorious flush in her cheeks, but it was the flush of their happy frolic in the orchard behind their little home, where the sunbeams and the white petals of the apple blossoms danced in the lustrous gold of her hair. He saw the laughter and the triumphs in her eyes, but they were of love and purity. He could not tell Scottie these things. They were of his own madness, and no man would understand.

A week later he was near the outlet of Silver Fox Creek, and something turned him in the direction of Pierre Croisset's cabin. It was early in the afternoon, and the sun was warm, and the air was filled with the pleasant perfume of earth and shrub and tree bursting into life. He had come within a quarter of a mile of Pierre's home when a sound stopped him. It was the low growling of a dog, very near to him; and then, as he listened, there came a girlish peal of laughter, so clear and sweet that he smiled in sheer sympathy with it.

He drew quietly nearer to the sound, and suddenly he found the sunlit glow of the Silver Fox almost at his feet. The girl's laugh rippled up to him again, and he peered down through a break in the balsam. Marie Croisset was so close that he could have tossed a pebble upon her bare head. In the centre of the stream was a rock, upon which she had lured a huge, tawny-haired sledge-dog. From her canoe the girl was teasing him.

Craig chuckled softly as he looked down upon their play. The girl's beauty stirred him strangely. It was half a child's beauty, half a woman's. Her slender body seemed a part of the canoe; her movements were like music as she balanced herself after each reckless feint toward the rock, or swift dip of her cedar paddle. Her round, brown arms were bare to the elbow, and suddenly she plunged one of them deep into the water and sent a cascade of spray over her comrade on the rock.

Craig caught the cry on his lips. For a moment she lost her balance. The canoe tipped; she gave a shrill little cry, and then, after another moment of suspense in which Craig was ready to jump, the frail craft straightened. The girl's plait had slipped over her shoulder into the water, and as she bent her head so that the drip of it would not wet her, she pointed playfully at the dog.

"Now see what you've done, Trigger!"

she cried. "I must go ashore and dry my hair, and you—you must swim!"

She swung the canoe quickly to the sandy shore, almost directly under Craig, and sprang out with the lightness of a fawn. Then her fingers slipped with feminine swiftness through the glistening strands of her hair, and before Craig could move, it fell in a dark and rippling glory to her hips, enriched by the pale glow of the sun that was already sinking behind the forests.

He caught the laughing beauty of her face as she turned, its deep, wild-rose flush, the glow of her eyes, the taunting loveliness of her red lips as she laughed at the Kazan on the rock; and with that vision of her breaking like a ray of sunlight into his darkened soul, Craig slipped quietly away.

He was curiously excited, and he found himself thinking strange things. It was not exertion that had made his heart beat a little faster or that had brought the warm glow into his face. His thoughts moved swiftly as he went toward Croisset's. He had looked upon a miracle. He had found beauty, and purity, and happiness in the heart of a wilderness; and in spite of him there rose another face before him—the face of one who was delving to the depths of life itself, in her search for the happiness which had come to this girl whose only companion outside of her cabin home was a dog!

For an hour he smoked his pipe with Croisset, while Croisset's wife prepared an early supper. And then Marie came, running breathlessly with Trigger at her heels, her unbound hair still leaping in riotous beauty about her. When she saw Craig standing before her, straight and smiling, his hand reaching out to her, there came a swift change in her face. The red blood surged into her cheeks; the laughter left her eyes; and Craig, looking deep into them as he held her small, trembling hand, saw something in their shy loveliness that was not of the child—but of woman.

It was late when he left. The moon had risen, and the wonderful world about him was bathed in its soft radiance. Croisset and the girl went with him to the beginning of the trail at the edge of the clearing. He shook hands with Pierre. The half-breed was relighting his pipe when he took Marie's hand again and looked once more down deep into her eyes. They met his own, a little frightened, a little questioningly, lustrously beautiful and pure in the moon-glow; and Craig saw in them that something—indefinable, more marvellous than life—which his soul had been crying to see in another woman's eyes since the dawn of desire within him. And now he knew that he had never seen it, not even in those first days of the fairy-land, years and years ago.

"Good-night, little Marie," he whispered.

And that night, for the first time, his voice rose in song as he went homeward through the forest.

III

TWICE each week, and then three times, Craig went to Croisset's cabin now. And each time that wonderful thing that he had found in the girl's eyes grew larger and more beautiful for him, until at last it walked with him, like a spirit, when he was alone, soothing the old pain at his heart, filling up the gnawing emptiness, covering over with sweetness and purity and love the ghastly ruins of what had once been. And still, as the weeks of spring drifted into summer, he spoke no word of love, and told Marie nothing of what had happened in the days gone by. He dreaded the moment of telling the story of his broken and twisted life.

And at last the day of it came. They had climbed to the top of the Sun Rock, half a mile from the Croisset cabin, and a hundred feet beneath them the vast solitude of green swamp and forest and sunlit lake reached out mile upon mile. Marie sat at his feet, gazing out upon the wonderful world, with her chin resting in the cup of her hands.

"Marie," he said suddenly, "I like your other name best—the Indian name which your father sometimes calls you. It's going to be my name for you. Me-lee—what does it mean?"

He saw the colour deepening in the girl's cheek. She looked up at him, and there was a mischievous glow in her eyes.

"It is Cree," she said. "An old Indian first called me that down at the mission, where I went to school."

"I know," he persisted, "but what does it mean?"

The colour grew deeper. She did not look up again.

"Do you see—off there—where the sun is setting?" she asked. "Out there—somewhere between the forests and the mountains—is what the Crees call the Valley of Silent Men. It is the Indian Heaven. There was a time, ages and ages ago, when the Crees had no Heaven, and at that time there lived a great chief who had a daughter so good and so beautiful that the Great Spirit himself fell in love with her, and came down upon earth to take her for his wife. But the old chief loved her, and wouldn't give her up, until at last the Great Spirit promised that in return for his daughter he would create a great Happy Hunting Ground in which all of the chief's people would come to life and live for ever after death. The chief gave up his daughter, and so, when his people die, they now go into the Valley of Silent Men. The girl's name was Me-lee."

Craig's hand touched her shoulder.

"The old Indian down at the mission was right, Me-lee."

She felt the warmth of his hand, and trembled.

"Why?" she whispered.

"Because—because you are the purest and the most beautiful creature in the world, Me-lee," he cried softly. "And I love you—love you——"

His arms gathered her close, and then in the shame and the joy that swept through him like sudden fire, he knew that the time had come when he must tell her all that he had told Scottie back in the cabin—and more. He kissed her lips again and again; he felt the throb and quiver of her body against him, and heard the sobbing tremulousness of her breath as her face nestled in sweet surrender against his own. He knew that she loved him—loved him as no other woman had ever loved him in his life, and when he lifted her face, and found her beautiful eyes humid with the tears of her happiness, he could only hold her closer, fighting to find a beginning for the thing which he wished to say.

It came hard, slowly at first, with Me-lee's pure eyes looking up into his own. And into those eyes, as he went on with the terrible story, there came the dark, startled pain of one who has learned that she is not first, the look that Craig had dreaded to see. But in an instant something else took its place, a look of wistful intentness, of pain for love; and her hand stole up to his face, and stroked it with the gentleness of one who understood, and who grieved because of his grief. Craig could look no longer into her eyes, and as he went on he gazed unseeing over her head into the world beyond. He left nothing unsaid. And at the end he felt Me-lee press closer to him, and with the sweetness of a child she raised her lips to his, and twined her arms about his neck.

IV

AFTER that, in the days that followed, Me-lee seemed to Craig something more than child or woman. In her eyes, in her gentle touch, in her wistful quickness to respond to his moods, he saw that she was fighting for him—and not for herself. Stranger to the world from which he had come, she saw his wounds and longed to heal them. It was wonderful to Craig. It was as if he had been close to death and she was nursing him back to life. Never did he see in her eyes what he might have expected to find there—the troublous visioning of the other woman. The time came when Craig knew that, if to sacrifice herself would give him greater happiness, Me-lee would send him back to the life and the woman he had once known. At last he had found love as he had dreamed that love should be.

It was midsummer when a messenger came up from Nelson House with word for Craig. He was wanted there at once. There was no explanation.

Scottie carried word to Me-lee, while Craig started south the next day. It was evening of the third day when Craig reached Nelson House. There were lights in the factor's quarters, and Craig went there at once. Blood, the Hudson's Bay Company's agent, greeted him mysteriously. He wrung Craig's hands until they ached, and almost immediately excused himself a little excitedly. He was gone five minutes, and Craig sat down, wondering what was in the wind.

He heard Blood returning. And then the door to the big, lighted room which was the factor's "den" opened and closed softly, and he heard a quick, gasping breath. His back was turned, and he whirled about.

"Good God!" he cried, springing to his feet.

Five steps away, her arms reaching out to him, her beautiful face filled with

a longing and a joy which he had never seen there before, stood the woman who had once been his wife.

"Tom!"

Some strange thing leaped into his head, and dazed him. He staggered toward her with a wild, low cry, seeing her through half blindness, and her name fell from his lips in a great sob. For a few insane moments reason left him. He felt her arms almost choking him in their embrace. Her lips were kissing him. He heard her repeating his name, over and over again, and he caught her to his breast madly.

"Isobel——"

The sound of her name brought him back, and with a still stranger cry he thrust her away from him, and stood facing her with a face as white as death.

"Tom—Tom——" she moaned, quailing before the terrible look which she saw in his eyes now. "I've been searching for you—hunting for you—for months and months. Oh, my God! Tom—Tom—you'll take me back! I didn't know how I loved you—until after—that. You'll take me back—you'll take me back——"

Her arms reached to him pleadingly, but his fingers did not unclench. He noticed now that she was dressed in a white, shimmering gown that made her look like an angel.

"Forbes——" He spoke the name in a hard, cold voice.

"He is dead," she said. "He died six months—after—after—we were married Tom—I've suffered—more than I can ever tell. I've been punished. Oh, Tom, I've been punished——"

"And he left you his money?"

"Yes—yes—I am rich, Tom."

Her eyes lit up at the eagerness of his question.

"And it is yours, all yours! Oh, you will forgive me—you will forgive me—you will take me back——"

Her arms were about him again; her white bosom throbbed against him, and she crushed her face against his breast.

He did not speak. His arms hung at his side. For a time he stared hard and unseeing at the wall. Then, so tenderly that a red flush of triumph surged into her face, he kissed her and pushed her away from him. The harshness was gone from his face. She saw a wonderful peace in his eyes.

"He left you—plenty of money?" he asked gently.

"Enough to last us always," she cried. "Nearly—nearly a million!"

Her white fingers were clasping and unclasping in the filmy lace at her breast.

"We can travel," she went on, excitement glorifying her eyes. "We can go where you have always wanted to go. You need never work again, Tom—never—never." She shrilled the words.

He held out his hand, and led her to the door. It was a white, pure night. Over the top of the earth the polar star gleamed like a mellow moon. The Great Dipper shone like a constellation of suns. Under the glorious sky the wilderness lay black and silent and peaceful. She looked into his face, and marvelled at its quiet happiness.

"You have made me suffer—terribly," he said, in a low voice, "but I do not lay it up against you. No, I do not forgive you to-night, Isobel—because I forgave you long ago—up there," and he pointed into the North. "I am glad he left you the money. It will be a reward for your suffering. I hope you will be happy—always. And I——"

"And you——" She trembled.

"See!" he cried, pointing again to the dazzling star. "Up there I went, wrecked and shattered, soul and heart gone—and I found peace. A woman—a girl—gave them back to me. What would you have me do?"

"We will pay her," whispered the woman who had been his wife.

"Yes, we will pay her," he repeated, and his face was illumined with the joy of the thought. "And what do you think would be a fair payment for the saving of a man's soul?" he asked.

"One thousand—ten thousand—more—more, if that's not enough."

He was tightening his belt.

"I am going to pay her—on Christmas day," he said quietly. "We are going to be married then. Good-bye, Isobel, and may God bless you—always!"

Like a shadow he slipped away into the white gloom of the night, into the North.

On the Top of the World

Mountain Peace

FROM all sides of the Galenstock, Father of Rivers, rivers run. From his height he surveys Italy, France, and Germany, which meet at his feet. His enormous brothers of the Alps bend towards him on all sides; but amid those turbulences of rock, river, and ice, he himself is seated calmly, stoled in eternal snows, like a white-robed figure of ancient peace. His wisdom is of the stars, and his knowledge of high heaven. From the height of his summit one seems able to observe the movement of the black and jagged world revolving beneath the stationary stars; to feel the quiver and vibration of the movement; to stem as on a chariot the winds of space. Borne on the earth, we rush onward, cleaving the infinite-like spirits carried along with incredible speed; and the constellations flash past us as we move.

Sir Ronald Ross.

THE sunbeams streak the azure skies,
And line with light the mountain's brow;
With hounds and horns the hunters rise,
And chase the roe-buck through the snow.
The goats wind slow their wonted way,
Up craggy steeps and ridges rude,
Marked by the wild wolf for his prey,
From desert cave or hanging wood.
And while the torrent thunders loud,
And as the echoing cliffs reply,
The huts peep o'er the morning's cloud,
Perched like an eagle's nest on high.

Samuel Rogers.

Neapolitan Apennines

FROM Eboli onward, the journey becomes increasingly beautiful; the valleys are full of asphodel and marigold, narcissus and jonquil spring up from the level lawns of grass on each of the narrow streams, and over all these float the magenta or rose-pink blossoms of Judas—and Upas-trees. The fantastic landscape, of enormous dimensions, is dominated by Monte Alburno, that mountain beloved of Virgil, the cracked and riven outline of which shows like a broken knife-edge against the vibrating blue of the sky. It is not possible to imagine the other side of this giant mountain, for it seems as if that nearest to us had been cut in cardboard and painted to resemble a hill, so that the other side would be hollow, unpainted and dusty, a shelter perhaps for theatrical ogres or stage thunder. The long summit looks as though pieces had been cut out of it by a child with a pair of scissors, but the bare granite surface is coolly radiant as ice on this hot day, showing every colour embraced in the predominant blue or purple of its shadows. Far down below sings that Greek stream, the Tanager, and to echo it lies the lovely Valle di Diano, a volcanic valley with the usual array of craters and hot streams, and rivers that run under ground for a mile or two. Through the haze that hangs over this vast view, small hills rise up so regular in shape that they appear to be deep blue pyramids.

Osbert Sitwell.

Nature's Architecture

ON the opposite shore, you will find rocks and cliffs of stupendous heights, hanging broken over the lake in horrible grandeur; some of them a thousand feet high, the woods climbing up their steep and shaggy sides, where mortal foot never yet approached. On these dreadful heights the eagles build their nests; a variety of waterfalls are seen pouring from their summits, and tumbling in vast sheets from rock to rock in rude and terrible magnificence; while, on all sides of the immense amphitheatre, the lofty mountains rise round, piercing the clouds in shapes as spiry and fantastic as the very rocks of Dovedale. To this I must add the frequent and bold projection of the cliffs into the lake, forming noble bays and promontories; in other parts, they finely retire from it; and often in abrupt chasms or clefts, through which at hand you see rich and uncultivated vales; and beyond these, at various distance, mountain rising over mountain; among which new prospects present themselves in mist, till the eye is lost in an agreeable perplexity:

" Where active fancy travels beyond sense,
And pictures things unseen."

John Brown.

A Castle in the Mountains

TOWARDS the close of the day, the road wound into a deep valley. Mountains, whose shaggy steeps appeared to be inaccessible, almost surrounded it. To the east, a vista opened, and exhibited the Apennines in their darkest horrors; and the long perspective of retiring summits rising over each other, their ridges clothed with pines, exhibited a stronger image of grandeur than anything that Emily had yet seen. The sun had just sunk below the top of the mountains she was descending, whose long shadow stretched athwart the valley; but his sloping rays, shooting through an opening of the cliffs, touched with a yellow gleam the summits of the forest that hung upon the opposite steeps, and streamed in full splendour upon the towers and battlements of a castle that spread its extensive ramparts along the brow of a precipice above. The splendour of these illumined objects was heightened by the contrasted shade which involved the valley below.

Mrs. Radcliffe.

MONT BLANC yet gleams on high; the power is there,
The still and solemn power of many sights
And many sounds, and much of life and death.
In the calm darkness of the moonless nights,
In the lone glare of day, the snows descend
Upon that Mountain; none beholds them there,
Nor when the flakes burn in the sinking sun,
Or the star-beams dart through them . . .

P. B. Shelley.

THE distance lends enchantment to the view,
And robes the mountain in its azure hue.

Thomas Campbell.

Silent Serenity

WHETHER we regard the moral or the material world, there is a silent serenity in the highest elevation.

Walter Savage Landor.

Hannibal Crosses The Alps

THE ninth day he woon the verie tops of the Alpes, through by-lanes and blind crankes: after he had wandred many times out of the way, either through the deceitfulnesse of their guides, or for that when they durst not trust them, they adventured rashly themselves upon the vallies, and guessed the way at adventure, and went by aime. Two daies abode he encamped upon the tops thereof, and the soldiors weried with travaile and fight rested that time: certaine also of the sumpter horses (which had slipt aside from the rockes) by following the tracks of the armie as it marched, came to the campe.

When they were thus overtoiled and wearied with these tedious travailes, the snow that fell (for now the starre Vergilie—that is, the Pleiades—was set and gone downe out of that horizon) increased their feare exceedingly.

Now when as at the breake of day the ensignes were set forward, and the armie marched slowly, through the thicke and deepe snow; and that there appeared in the countenance of them all, slouthfulness and desperation: Anniball advanced before the standerds, and commaunded his soldiours to stay upon a certaine high hill (from whence they had a goodly prospect and might see a great way all about them), and there shewed unto them Italie, and the goodly champion fields about the Po, which lie hard under the foot of the Alpine mountains: saying, That even then they mounted the wals, not only of Italy, but also of the cittie of Rome; as for all besides (saith hee) will be plaine and easie to be travelled: and after one or two battailes at the most, ye shall have at your command, the verie castle and head citie of all Italy. Philemon Holland.

MONA on Snowdon calls:
  Hear, thou king of mountains, hear;
  Hark, she speaks from all her strings:
  Hark, her loudest echo rings;
King of mountains, bend thine ear:
  Send thy spirits, send them soon,
  Now, when midnight and the moon
Meet upon thy front of snow;
  See, their gold and ebon rod,
  Where the sober sisters nod,
And greet in whispers sage and slow.
Snowdon, mark! 'tis magic's hour,
Now the muttered spell hath power;
Power to rend thy ribs of rock,
And burst thy base with thunder's shock:
But to thee no ruder spell
Shall Mona use, than those that dwell
In music's secret cells, and lie
Steeped in the stream of harmony. William Mason.

The Montain Hall of Eblis

IN this manner they advanced by moonlight till they came within view of the two towering rocks that form a kind of portal to the valley, at the extremity of which rose the vast ruins of Istakar. Aloft, on the mountain, glimmered the fronts of the various royal mausoleums, the horror of which was deepened by the shadows of the night. They passed through two villages, almost deserted; the only inhabitants remaining being a few feeble old men, who, at the sight of the horses and litters, fell upon their knees and cried out: "O Heaven! is it then by these phantoms that we have been for six months tormented? Alas! it was from the terror of these spectres and the noise beneath the mountains that our people have fled and left us at the mercy of maleficent spirits." William Beckford.

In The West Indies

WE were never so fortunate as to see the Souffriere entirely free from cloud. The lower, wider, and more ancient crater was generally clear; but out of the midst of it rose a second cone buried in darkness and mist. Once only we caught sight of part of its lip, and the sight was one not to be forgotten. The sun was rising behind the hills. The purple mountain was backed by clear blue sky. High above it hung sheets of orange cloud lighted from underneath lower down, and close upon the hill-tops, curved sheets of bright white mist

" Stooped from heaven, and took the shape,
With fold on fold, of mountain and of cape."

And under them, again, the crater seethed with grey mist, among which, at one moment, we could discern portions of its lip, not smooth, like that of Vesuvius, but broken into awful peaks and chasms . . . CHARLES KINGSLEY.

I LIVE not in myself, but I become,
Portion of that around me; and to me
High mountains are a feeling, but the hum
Of human cities, torture. BYRON.

When I have hung
Above the raven's nest by knots of grass
And half-inch fissures in the slippery rock
But ill-sustained, and almost (so it seemed)
Suspended by the blast that blew amain,
Shouldering the naked crag, oh, at that time
While on the perilous ridge I hung alone,
With what strange utterance did the loud dry wind
Blow through my ear! The sky seemed not a sky
Of earth—and with what motion moved the clouds!
WILLIAM WORDSWORTH.

THE nodding horror of whose shady brows
Threats the forlorn and wand'ring passenger. MILTON.

Mount Pilatus in Mist

THE mountain was seen to send down its rugged sides thick wreaths of heaving mist, which, rolling through the rugged chasms that seamed the grisly hill, resembled torrents of rushing lava pouring down from a volcano. The ridgy precipices, which formed the sides of these huge ravines, showed their splintery and rugged edges over the vapour, as if dividing from each other the descending streams of mist which rolled around them. As a strong contrast to this gloomy and threatening scene, the more distant mountain range of Righi shone brilliant with all the hues of an autumnal sun. SIR WALTER SCOTT.

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Because We Loved Him

"Crime makes the shame and not the scaffold"

By CAPT. FRANK H. SHAW

"THE finest man I ever met at sea," said the chief officer of the R.M.S. *Cleopatra*, "was Captain Lossing. The finest man that ever existed in a profession that breeds many heroes and—which is equally true—many blackguards. I sailed with him for half-a-dozen voyages, and he endeared himself to me so marvellously, that when the time came I sacrificed all my most cherished ideals to render his position easier than it might have been otherwise. I could tell you stories of that man which would make your eyes water, for in some respects he was something rather better than the average saint. But he had, in common with most noble spirits, one terrible failing." The chief officer lifted his hand significantly, and crooked his little finger in the attitude of a man emptying a tumbler. I nodded understandingly.

"Yes, it was the drink—the thing that has cancelled more officers' certificates, and run more fine ships ashore than all the fogs and storms that ever happened since first men used the ocean highways. But very seldom did Captain Lossing indulge too freely. As a rule, he was as sober as a training athlete, or a deep-water sailor six months from port. But when certain anniversaries came round, then was the time he overstepped the mark. There were three of these days: one was the anniversary of the time his wife was swept overboard from the old *Persephone* on account of the helmsman letting her broach-to; another was the anniversary of the day his daughter ran away with a ne'er-do-well soldier; the other was the anniversary of the day he had his certificate suspended for losing his ship in a fog. And on each of these days he went in for a regular orgy—a mad debauch, so that at times he was worse than an untamed fiend.

"A greater contrast you couldn't have imagined than existed between his two states. He seemed possessed of a dual personality; a sort of Jekyll and Hyde affair. In his sober moments he was mild and very thoughtful, and his calm, grey eyes beamed with gentle tenderness. In his inebriated state he foamed at the mouth; he raved and cursed until a listener would have held his breath for fear of the very heavens falling in justice on his profanity. As I said, he was half-angel, half-fiend.

"And yet, we loved him well. It gets that way, somehow, when you see what a man is really, underneath, before the drink gets in and saps away his better self, turning it into a reproach and a horrible atrocity. There wasn't a soul aboard the ship but would have cut off a limb to serve the old man in the smallest way. He deserved it all and more.

"That was aboard the *Humen*, a tramp steamer I was second mate of at the time I'm talking about. You could tell what sort of man Lossing was by the fact that he signed on the same crew—officers and men alike—voyage after voyage, and when you remember that the average steamboat man is a sort of carrier-pigeon, here to-day and gone to-morrow, I reckon that one small fact speaks more for Captain Lossing's power of breeding affection for himself than anything else.

"As a case in point let me tell you what he did once in that ship. We'd been in Santos, which was at that time at the very height of its fame as a death-trap. Ships were left without a single man aboard, the whole crowd of them swept clean by yellow fever. Other ships rotted at their moorings for want of a crew to take them home; but somehow or other, either because Captain Lossing exerted himself as I knew no other skipper ever did, or because there was a good fairy presiding over our destinies, we hadn't a single case of 'el vomito' in all the crew. We cleared for New York with a clean bill of health; and then—just when we were off Pernambuco—the bo'sun fell sick. Yes, it was Yellow Jack, and a mighty bad case at that. Of course the crew panicked—who wouldn't? They left the

sick man to himself, and swore themselves black in the face that they wouldn't go near the infected den in which he lay. Lossing didn't say anything; he looked at the thing quite from their point of view. Give me Yellow Jack for setting up a scare amongst the best crew of sailormen who ever signed articles for a deep-water voyage against any other disease in the world.

" But the skipper made his arrangements. He carted the men aft under the poop, and they snugged down there comfortably enough. Then he called me and the mate to a conference, and gave us explicit instructions as to what we were to do. Next he got up the medicine chest, and had it carried to the fore-deck, and from there he lugged it himself into the bo'sun's room. After that we on deck saw him no more. He effaced himself completely from the life of the ship, and shut himself up to nurse the bo'sun back to life. He did it, too. There were days when the yells of the sick man were simply too awful for description, but the old man sat it out like a Briton, and won that hard fight with something to spare. The steward used to carry the meals to the door of the improvised hospital, and left them there, but one day we noticed that Captain Lossing didn't come out to take in the tray. I got a bit sick at that, and—though he'd given us express orders that he was not to be approached—I went forward myself, and peeped in through the port. There was the bo'sun lying in his bunk sound asleep, and his hand was clutched in the hand of our skipper. The old man was white and fagged, and I could see from the strained expression of his fine old face that he was in great pain, but he never moved so much as a finger while I watched. I tiptoed to the door and opened it very gently. He smiled a little when he saw me, but he held up one hand for silence. He'd sat that way, clutching the bo'sun's hand, for twenty hours without moving, because the sailor had fallen into the first decent sleep he'd had since the disease took him!

" That was Lossing at his best. I could cite a hundred similar cases, but they couldn't add more to his reputation, I think. Once, he found that a sailor who'd broken an arm and had been sent to hospital, had intended to be married as soon as the ship reached port. The man hadn't a cent left by the time he was cured, but Lossing came along and gave that fellow every cent he'd have earned had he been able-bodied, and added a thundering good wedding present in addition. Was it any wonder that we simply worshipped him?

" I won't say anything about his bad moods, because this yarn is to deal with the worst of them. Imagine the greatest contrast you can to the man who would risk life without a qualm for the sake of a fellow who was supposed to be absolutely beneath his notice, and there you have Lossing in drink.

" We shipped a new first mate in Liverpool one voyage. He was an all-right sort of a man, but a little bit hectoring in his ways. He'd had a command in sail before he came into steam, and it takes a man who's been skipper a little time to settle down into a subordinate position. Graves—the mate's name—didn't cotton to his new position at all, and being a youngish man, with an extra ticket and all the modern notions of progressive seamanship, he was in the habit of contradicting the skipper pretty frequently. Lossing bore it with all the patience of an angel. He poured oil on the troubled waters most zealously; he flattered Graves in a hundred ways, and took his advice calmly enough. But the more he gave in to the mate the more aggressive Graves got. And after a while Lossing noticed it. He couldn't have helped it, unless he'd been as blind as a bat. So, after some time a certain amount of coolness grew up between the two. It wasn't anything really antagonistic, just a sort of cold indifference on the part of each man; but on a dozen occasions Lossing did his best to step over the gap, and heal the breach. But Graves' pride was up in arms. It was in vain that I took him aside and spoke to him like an elder brother, citing case after case of Lossing's goodness; Graves simply gave me to understand that he was mate and I was second, and that his affairs were his own concern.

" Things went on this way for some time. Graves had never been popular with the rest of the crew; he had too much of the Navy style about him, which doesn't go aboard a merchant ship; but when the hands—hands, mind you, who'd sailed voyage after voyage with the skipper—saw that there was a strain between them, they naturally sided with the skipper, and didn't do much to please the mate. All of which Graves noticed, and treasured up at the back of his mind.

"We were bound across the Atlantic homeward, when the affair came to its climax. We ran into one of those nasty Atlantic gales—the sort that last for days and sometimes weeks. There isn't a really howling gale, but it is very persistent, and is accompanied with a sort of murky thickness, mist and fine rain, that is very unpleasant, and also a trifle dangerous. The *Humen* made good enough weather of it, though. She was not deep laden, she was a good sea boat, and we had a chief engineer who could have constructed a new set of engines out of a suspension bridge and a bicycle, I believe. So we had nothing to fear on the score of the machinery getting out of order.

¶

"THE second day of the bad weather, when the ship was shouldering her way groaningly across half-seen combers that swung up swiftly out of the north-east, lifted her high until her screw raced like an electric fan, and then swung away into the unseen distance, leaving the old tramp shuddering and squelching in the trough, was one of old Lossing's anniversaries. And it happened to be the worst one of all. I remembered it with something of a shock, at breakfast time. The old man hadn't turned out to first-table breakfast, and was just sitting down when the mate relieved me. He was white and haggard, and there was a horrible fixed look in his eyes, that I had learnt to know well. He didn't speak a word to me, but once he shouted for the steward, and when the whiff of his breath passed my face, I knew that he'd started.

"I didn't care much. Both Graves and I knew our work, and we were men enough to worry through without Lossing's assistance, even if the gale had been twice as bad as it was. But before dinner-time the skipper had got to the raving stage, and by four o'clock that afternoon he was maudlin. I knew his moods, and I cautioned the steward to keep him in the cabin at the risk of his life, for the maudlin stage was generally followed by one of fierce repentance, during which he would strive to drown his remorse in repeated doses of whisky, and after that—he was all of a madman unchained. And if he got out on deck at that stage there was no telling what might happen.

"At midnight I went up on the bridge to relieve the mate. It was a rip-snorter of a night; the rain was slatting down in solid sheets, the sea was rising somewhat and the scanty rigging was whistling like mad as the gale tore through it. Every now and then the *Humen* put her nose down to it, and lolloped a couple of hundred tons of solid Atlantic over the forecastle head, and before she staggered up again, the screw would grind and rattle as if all the broken glass in the world were being re-broken down in the engine-room. A typical Atlantic night it was.

"As was usually the case, the mate stayed back for a little while to have a yarn, and to tell me the course, and so on. But when he'd done this he hesitated, and then said:

"'Does the old man go on the tear like this often?' I said that it was a very infrequent occurrence, never knowing what was in the back of the mate's mind.

"'It would be a jolly good handle against him—if a man happened to need it,' he went on, as though he hadn't heard me. 'He's given me one or two black looks since I've been aboard this ship, and a man who drinks to excess can't afford to be at loggerheads with those who would be well enough suited if they fell into his shoes.'

"I didn't say anything, for the meanness of the thought sickened me a bit. Still, I suppose it was only a natural thought, after all, on the mate's part, for he didn't know Lossing as we did. But to suggest that he would deliberately go and report the old man's small sins to the owners so that he himself could get the command—well, it wasn't cricket!

"'For two pins—ay, for one—I'd do it fast enough,' growled the mate, when I remained silent. 'Myers and Standcroft wouldn't stand for habitual drunkenness from one of their skippers if they knew about it. And I've had a command before, I'd like you to know. It wasn't my fault I came here as mate. I'm looking forward to getting skipper in one of these boats before very long—and it's every man for himself nowadays. If there isn't a legitimate vacancy I reckon a man is justified in making one.' I hadn't seen anything of a shadowy figure at the after end of the bridge, behind a big chest that was stowed there for lifebelts. But the mate had raised his voice considerably, and all of a sudden that shadowy shape came out into full view. It was the skipper himself, and the light of the binnacle fell on his face as he passed me.

I'll never forget the demoniacal savagery of that countenance so long as I live.

"I got in front of him, and tried to bar his path, for I saw from the concentrated hatred on his face that he'd heard every word the mate had said, but he lifted his fist, and—I retired from service for a little while anyhow. He'd hit me in the jaw, and there were more stars before my eyes than ever blazed in a tropical sky.

"Then he went up to the mate. Of course, I didn't hear this part of the business, for I was otherwise engaged, but the man at the wheel told me about it afterwards. The skipper's voice was very quiet and silky, as he commenced speaking.

"'You've allowed the helmsman to steer too northerly a course, Mr. Mate,' he said softly. "I'm afraid you'll run up against some ice in this course, if you don't look out.'

"Some demon of contradiction prompted the mate to argue the point. I don't know why; perhaps it was because he felt guilty of his scheming a little while before, and wanted to justify himself to himself; but anyway he said:

"'That course is a perfectly safe one. I know my business, and I'm not to be taught it by a man who's incapably drunk! You'd better go to your room, and turn in, and leave the navigation of the ship to men who're not sots.'

"I told you the skipper was drunk. That speech from the mate coming on top of the words he had previously heard, and the whole lot distorted out of all proportion by a sotted brain, did the trick. Captain Lossing uttered a scream, cursed Graves to his face for an insolent and incompetent officer, and then in an instant they were at grips with one another. The man at the wheel would have interfered, but the ship was taking all he could give her, and he knew that if he let go the spokes for an instant the steamer would broach-to, and be swamped in all probability. He was compelled to stay where he was, though his every wish was to part the two men.

"They swayed and struggled up and down the bridge like fiends unchained. The mate was a powerful man, but Captain Lossing, in his cups, was stronger than Samson himself. The helmsman left the wheel for one second, but just then the ship flew away from the wind, and shipped a mighty sea that shook her to pieces almost, and he was obliged to hurry back, though he yelled as he went for some of the watch on deck to come to the bridge. But the watch had just been relieved; those whose turn was to be on deck had sneaked below for a surreptitous smoke, and the decks were deserted.

"It was their harsh voices and the scuffling of their heavy-shod feet on the planking of the bridge that brought me to my senses. For a moment I couldn't tell what had happened as I sat up, for I was feeling sick and giddy, and my head was ringing like a bell. But just as I tumbled to what was the matter, a cloud cleared away from the face of the moon, and the whole affair showed clearly. Lossing had got the mate pressed back against the bridge-rails, overhanging the boiling sea. He was almost demented, as I saw from the strained frenzy of his face, and he did not know what he was doing. But just as I heard a hoarse, sickening scream tear from the mate's half-strangled throat, just as I got to my feet, and raced towards the spot, the thing happened. There was a snap that rose above the yelling of the storm, a wild cry, a dull splash, and I saw what I saw. Lossing was reeling back from the rail which had snapped in two with the weight of the men upon it, and Lossing was alone. There was no sign of the mate to be seen!

"I did what I could. I rang the engines to stop, and shouted to the helmsman to port his helm as hard as he could, so that the mate wouldn't be fouled by the screw. These orders came automatically, and almost before they'd been shouted I was whistling hard for the hands to clear away a boat. But the size of the sea that was running put it out of the question to lower the boat at all. It would simply have meant throwing away half-a-dozen lives after the other one. We tried it—for we knew what it would mean to the old man if the mate were lost—but the boat was smashed to flinders before it touched the water, and the men drew back. They were brave, well-tried sailors, but they recognised the futility of an attempt at rescue under those conditions.

"I'd let a buoy with a Holmes light go as soon as I'd whistled for the hands, and we could see the light floating dimly astern. I went back to the bridge as soon as I saw we couldn't go, and spoke down the speaking tube to the chief engineer, telling him that I intended to stand by till morning, in case Graves had got the buoy. I knew he was a fine swimmer, for I'd seen his

medals, but my heart sank when I saw the size of the sea that was running. Captain Webb himself couldn't have made good against it.

" I'd forgotten the skipper in the rush of events, but when we'd grown quiet I bethought me of what this would mean to him. He was a murderer to all intents and purposes, though perhaps a jury might have given it in as manslaughter. But I'd seen his face, and I knew myself that he meant to kill the mate as they struggled there over the bridge rails. What was I to do? was the question with which I was confronted. Here was the man who'd befriended me in a hundred ways; who'd given me more than I could ever hope to repay. I could stand between him and exposure perhaps, but I knew him too well for that. The moment he realised what he'd done he'd be driven to the deepest depths of despair. He would break his heart assuredly, and would never lift his head again. If he knew! That was the thought that flew through my mind. If he knew! Now, I was quite aware that after one of his bouts he generally had only a hazy idea of what had happened during the drunken spell, and it came to me then that he might not remember the fight on the bridge and the subsequent tragedy.

" I was tramping the bridge slowly, pondering over these matters, when I kicked something soft, and when I put my hand down I saw it was Captain Lossing. He had collapsed quite, and lay there like a log, breathing heavily, and quite unconscious. I called the men along, and got him carried to his room, and then, when that was done, there was nothing to do but think the matter over, and wait for the day to come.

" I had a talk with the man at the wheel first. He was one of the men who'd benefited most by Lossing's kindness.

" ' Did you see what happened there, Jones? ' I asked him.

" ' That scrap between the captain and the mate, sir? Yes, sir, I saw it all.' And he looked at me very significantly.

" ' It will break the captain's heart,' I said slowly. ' When he comes to his senses, he'll break his heart in pieces.'

" ' He'll never know anything about it from me, sir,' said Jones sturdily. ' I owe Captain Lossing too much to peach on him when he's not responsible—or at any other blessed time, sir.' That was a good spirit to show, I thought. I talked it over clearly with Jones, and sounded him to the very bilges. He was real grit, right through, and I knew at least that if Captain Lossing's happiness depended on the helmsman it was a sure thing.

" Next thing I did was to go down amongst the men and sound them as to what they knew of the affair. Of course some of them had an idea that all wasn't quite as it should have been; in fact, two of them had just seen the struggle just as they were hurrying on deck after their smoke, and, sailorlike, they'd spoken their suspicions to the others. But I spoke as feelingly as I could, and they remembered what had been done for them by the man they loved. And so, because we loved him, we entered into a conspiracy of silence against Captain Lossing.

" For the rest of that night I had enough to do to keep me busy. My thoughts would continually fly to the poor old man who had been the cause of the tragedy. Knowing him as I did I was quite aware of all that it would mean, but I gritted my teeth and said that he never should know from me, or from any other soul aboard. It all depended on the morning, and what the morning brought. If it brought a recollection of the tragedy all our plans would be upset: if it brought forgetfulness, we could act the whole great lie through to the end. I knew it was being accessories after the fact, that we were bringing ourselves within the law for attempting to shield a guilty man, but we loved him—that was all. We'd have gone through the gates of death for him, and what we purposed doing was a little thing by comparison.

¶

" AND so the morning came, and with it a lessening of the gale and clear skies. As soon as it was light I put the steamer about and cruised over the sea generally, but there was nothing to be found. Even the lifebuoy had disappeared, and the ocean was bare of anything that lived. It was with a heavy heart that I gave the word to go ahead again, for I'd built more than I knew on the hope of finding the mate after all. But I was strong in my purpose of keeping the truth from the skipper.

" Breakfast time came, and in accordance with the custom the mate ought to have gone to the saloon. I couldn't leave the bridge, for the ship had been swept a long way out of her course during the night, and I'd to

work out a new course to make up for it; so the old man was compelled to breakfast alone. He came on to the bridge when he'd finished. There was not the slightest sign about him of the previous day's orgy. But he was ashamed of himself, and flushed when he caught my eye.

"'Where's the mate?' he asked briskly. 'He shouldn't have allowed his breakfast to grow cold. I don't like my officers to have their food spoilt.' It was little things like that—things you don't often find in a skipper—that helped to endear him to us.

"I composed myself for the lie.

"'The mate was swept overboard during the night, sir. We shipped a big sea over the bridge, and the mate was leaning over the rail to leeward. That's what happened.' And I pointed to the broken rail and the torn canvas of the weather-cloth.

"'Swept overboard!' he cried, incredulously. And then my heart jumped with relief, for I saw that he hadn't the faintest suspicion of what had occurred.

"'Yes, sir,' I said glibly. 'He was swept overboard, and though we lowered a boat and threw a buoy there was no chance of saving him. I'm afraid he must have been drawn into the propeller.' And then, all the time he listened with a white agonised face, I called upon my imagination and constructed as circumstantial a tragedy as I could. I gave a hundred details, I drew a lurid word picture of the size of the fictitious wave that had dashed the mate overboard, and I threw in the few expressions of valedictory praise for the dead man, and I congratulated myself that I'd done the thing very well indeed.

"'My God!' said Lossing sharply. 'Dead! And—God forgive me! I had allowed myself to harbour wicked thoughts against that poor fellow. Dead! Oh, the poor man! We must do something for his people, for he told me he had a young wife dependent on him, besides his mother. Dead—and—I was—my God!' He turned to me with hot tears rolling down his working face, and stretched his trembling hands in agonised pleading for mercy, it looked like. 'My God!' he said again, 'and I was—drunk! If I'd been sober this might never have happened. I've picked drowning men out of a bigger sea than this, and my experience might have saved him.' And then he broke down.

"We did our best to cheer him, and we succeeded. We were so overjoyed at the fact that he was in perfect ignorance of his crime, that we were able to call upon ourselves to any extent, and gradually we won him away from his self-condemnation, and got a smile on his face again."

The chief officer of the *Cleopatra* stopped, and a pained look came across his face.

"I don't know how he fell upon the truth," he said slowly, "but he did. Whether it was that one of the men had shrunk from him instinctively; whether constant gazing upon the broken rail of the bridge—we'd not repaired it, because we should need to report the affair to the authorities at home—or what it was, I can't say, but one morning he tumbled to it all.

"He came to me on the bridge and looked me in the face. I returned the look; suspecting nothing, and then he said solemnly:

"'As God is your Judge, how did the mate die?' I was staggered for the moment, not expecting anything of the sort, and I suppose my face must have told him the truth.

"'I've told you once, sir,' I said. 'I can only repeat what I've already said.' His face rippled with a very grave smile.

"'Will you swear that's true before the God you must meet some day? Come, swear it!' I couldn't. I tried to tell the lie roundly, saying in my heart that I was justified, but the words wouldn't come. I stammered, and grew confused, and when the first word came it was only a husky croak.

"'Ah!' he said gently, 'I know now. I thought it was only a bad dream, but now I remember hearing words, and feeling a devil at work within me. At times when I try to sleep I seem to see a white, twisted face staring into mine—tell me truly, did I—did I——?' And his piercing eyes read into my very soul.

"And then, with a rush, the lie came from my lips. I don't know how I managed to speak it—but I did. It must have been because I loved him so well.

"For one brief moment his face lit up, and hope shone from his eyes. Then the old horror settled back like a thick veil.

"'You've tried well, lad,' he said bitterly, 'but it won't do. I know now. I don't know why I know, but I do. How did it happen?'

"It—it was an accident, I told him. I lied unblushingly, but I could see that I was not convincing him.

"'I murdered Mr. Graves,' he said with

numb despair in every accent. ' What shall I do—what shall I do ? '

" ' Nothing,' I said as firmly as I could. ' The affair has been logged as an accident, sir. If you told the crew that you had—had killed him they would laugh in your face.'

" And then for a moment a pleased smile lit up his face.

" ' Ay,' he said, and his deep voice had something of a ring in it. ' They'd do that. They'd perjure themselves so that I might go unscathed ? It's strange, lad.'

" ' It's not strange,' I said hotly. ' It's less than you deserve, sir. We've got men's hearts in our breasts, and we're ready to do more than that to save—a man.'

" But it was all no use.

" ' No, lad,' he said again and again, ' I've done the bad work, and I must pay the price. I can't have you dear fellows perjuring yourselves to save me. When the ship gets to Liverpool, I shall go to the authorities, and make a clean breast of it. It's better so.'

" There was no moving him. Though I vowed every man would go up to the police, and swear in a body that there had only been an accident, he was adamant.

" ' There must be a price for every sin,' he said. ' I'm ready to pay it, lad.'

" But after a while he turned to me and said :

" ' If it pleases God to let me get clear of this terrible thing, if the law spares me, lad—my own soul will never spare me—I'll never look on the cursed stuff again. I've been a child to drown my sorrows so, but I've learnt my lesson."

" I didn't know what to do. I couldn't see him throw away his very life like that. He was old ; even if he were acquitted of the charge of murder, and convicted only of manslaughter, the long confinement would kill him. And—we loved him.

" But Fate had a solution at hand. It was a murky, drizzling day as we hauled into dock at Liverpool, and when we had made fast, the old man being worn out with the constant tension—we'd had a thick fog up Channel—I advised him to go to his room and lie down, while I saw to the work on hand. And then, after he'd gone, I looked up on to the wharf, and saw a big, overcoated figure watching me. I started a bit as something familiar in the shape of the man struck my fancy, and then the voice of Graves himself came booming down to me !

" I had him by the hand in a second, and he was in my room in another. He'd been picked up by a homeward-bound Cunarder.

" ' But I'll have my revenge for that man's crime,' he protested, after he had told me all there was to tell. ' He meant murder that night, I tell you. I saw it in his face. In everything but the actual deed Captain Lossing is a murderer. If I hadn't been something above the ordinary as a swimmer, nothing could have saved me.'

" ' What will you do ? ' I asked him earnestly, for the man's face was alight with an unholy glare. His lips were twitching, and his eyes blazed like a madman's.

" ' Do ? I'll make him pay with the rest of his life for what he did to me that night. Let me see him once, just to tell him what I intend, and then I go to the police and give the matter into their hands. I'm going to his room now, and you'll see the effect upon him. I wouldn't miss the scene for all the money in Liverpool.'

" I could have strangled the fellow myself. The vindictiveness of him was appalling, but then—he hadn't known Lossing as we others had. But a sudden resolve came to me. I got up, and signed to him to follow.

" ' Very well,' I said, ' you shall see him.' And I led him to the skipper's room.

" I never want to see the hopeless misery that was writ large on our old skipper's face reproduced on another countenance. He was sitting at his table, his eyes fixed upon a card before him. I knew in that moment that it was a pledge he had newly signed.

He never saw us, and for long minutes we stood there, looking upon the awful sight of a man struggling with his naked soul.

When he raised his face there was a glow of peace that was almost holy upon it.

" Then I drew Graves away. ' You've seen him,' I said, and my voice was choking as I spoke. He rubbed his sleeve across his eyes himself and sniffed openly. I scanned his face anxiously.

" ' Well,' I said, ' what is it to be ? '

" He hesitated a little, and I went on : ' We're ready to die to save that man from himself. You don't know him as we do, but——'

" ' He's safe from me,' he said suddenly. ' I've learnt my lesson, too.'

" Then he went into the room, and put his hand on the skipper's arm."

The Tiger and The Baby

An economy campaign and its amusing sequel

By ARNOLD BENNETT

GEORGE PEEL and Mary, his wife, sat down to breakfast. Their only son, Georgie, was already seated. George the younger showed an astounding disregard for the decencies of life, and a frankly gluttonous absorption in food which amounted to cynicism. Evidently he cared for nothing but the satisfaction of bodily desires. Yet he was twenty-two months old, and occupied a commanding situation in a high chair! His father and mother were aged thirty-two and twenty-eight respectively.

They both had pale, intellectual faces; they were dressed with elegance, and their gestures were the gestures of people accustomed to be waited upon, and to consider luxuries as necessaries. There was silver upon the table, and the room, though small and somewhat disordered, had in it beautiful things which had cost money. Through a doorway half-screened by a portière could be seen a large studio peopled with heroic statuary plaster casts, and lumps of clay veiled in wet cloths. And on the other side of the great window of the studio, green trees waved their foliage. The trees were in Regents Park. Another detail to show that the Peels had not precisely failed in life: the time was ten-thirty o'clock! Millions of persons in London had already been at hard work for hours.

And indeed George Peel was not merely a young sculptor of marked talent; he was also a rising young sculptor. For instance, when you mentioned his name in artistic circles the company signified that it knew whom you meant, and those members of the company who had never seen his work, had to feel ashamed of themselves. Further, he had lately been awarded the Triennial Gold Medal of the International Society, an honour that no Englishman had previously achieved. His friends and himself had, by the way, celebrated this dazzling event by a noble and joyous gathering in the studio, at which famous personages had been present.

Everybody knew that George Peel, in addition to what he earned, had important "private resources." For even rising young sculptors cannot live luxuriously on what they gain, and you cannot eat gold medals. Nor will gold medals pay a heavy rent or the cost of manual help in marble cutting. All other rising young sculptors envied George Peel, and he rather condescended to them (in his own mind) because they had to keep up appearances by means of subterfuges, whereas there was no deception about his large and ample existence.

On the table by Mary's plate was a letter, the sole letter. It had come by the second post. The contents of the first post had been perused in bed. While Mary was scraping porridge off the younger George's bib with a spoon, and wiping porridge out of his eyes with a serviette, George the elder gave just a glance at the letter.

"So he has written, after all!" said George, in a voice that tried to be nonchalant.

"Who?" asked Mary, although she had already seen the envelope, and knew exactly what George meant. And her voice also was unnatural in its attempted casualness.

"The old cock," said George, beginning to serve bacon.

"Oh!" said Mary, coming to her chair, and beginning to dispense tea.

She was dying to open the letter, yet she poured out the tea with superhuman leisureliness, and then indicated to Georgie exactly where to search for bits of porridge on his big plate, while George with a great appearance of calm unfolded a newspaper. Then at length she did open the letter. Having read it, she put her lips tighter together, nodded, and passed the letter to George. And George read:

> Dear Mary,—I cannot accede to your request.
>
> Your affectionate uncle,
>
> SAMUEL PEEL.
>
> P.S.—The expenses connected with my County Council election will be terrible.—S.P.

George lifted his eyebrows, as if to indicate that in his opinion there was no accounting for the wild stupidity of human nature, and that he as a philosopher refused to be startled by anything whatever.

"Curt!" he muttered coldly.

Mary uneasily laughed.

"What shall you do?" she enquired.

"Without!" replied George, with a curtness that equalled Mary's uncle's.

"And what about the rent?"

"The rent will have to wait."

A brave young man! Nevertheless, he saw in that moment chasms at his feet—chasms in which he and his wife and child and his brilliant prospects might be swallowed up. He changed the subject.

"You didn't see this cutting," he said, and passed a slip from a newspaper gummed to a piece of green paper.

George, in his quality of rising young sculptor, received press cuttings from an agency. This one was from *Smart Society*, a somewhat vulgar weekly, and it gave, in two paragraphs, a somewhat vulgar account of the recent festivity at George's studio. It finished with the words: "Heidsieck flowed freely." He could not guess who had written it. No! It was not in the nicest taste, but it constituted indubitable proof that George was still rising, that he was a figure in the world.

"What a rag!" he observed, with an expression of repugnance. "Read by suburban shop-girls, I suppose."

II

GEORGE had arranged his career in a quite exceptional way. It is true that chance had served him; but then he had known how to make use of chance to the highest advantage. The chance that had served him lay in the facts that Mary Peel had fallen gravely in love with him, that her sole surviving relative was a rich uncle, and that George's surname was the same as hers and her uncle's. He had met niece and uncle in Bursley in the Five Towns, where old Samuel Peel was a personage, and, timidly, a patron of the arts. Having regard to his golden hair and affection-compelling appearances, it was not surprising that Mary, accustomed to the monotony of her uncle's house, had surrendered her heart to him. And it was not surprising that old Peel had at once consented to the match, and made a will in favour of Mary and her offspring. What was surprising was that old Peel should have begun to part with his money at once, and in large quantities, for he was not of a very open-handed disposition.

The explanation of old Samuel Peel's generosity was due to his being a cousin of the Peels of Bursley, the great eighteenth-century family of earthenware manufacturers, second only to Wedgwoods. The main branch had died out, the notorious Carlotta Peel having expired shockingly in Paris, and another young descendant, Matthew, having been forced under a will to alter his name to Peel-Swynnerton. So that only the distant cousin, Samuel Peel, was left, and he was a bachelor with no prospect of ever being anything else. Now Samuel had made a fortune of his own, and he considered that all the honour and all the historical splendours of the Peel family were concentrated in himself. And he tried to be worthy of them. He tried to restore the family traditions. For this he became a benefactor of his native town, a patron of the arts, and a candidate for the Staffordshire County Council. And when Mary set her young mind on a young man of parts and of ambition, and bearing by hazard the very same name of Peel, old Samuel Peel said to himself: "The old family name will not die out. It ought to be more magnificent than ever." He said this also to George Peel.

Whereupon George Peel talked to him persuasively and sensibly about the risks and the prizes of the sculptor's career. He explained exactly how extremely ambitious he was, and all that he had already done, and all that he intended to do. And he convinced his uncle-in-law that young sculptors were tremendously handicapped in an expensive and difficult profession by poverty or at least narrowness of means. He convinced his uncle-in-law that the best manner of succeeding was to begin at the top, to try for only the highest things, to sell nothing cheaply, to be haughty with dealers and connoisseurs, and to cut a figure in the very centre of the art-world of London. George was a good talker, and all that he said was perfectly true. And his uncle was dazzled by the immediate prospect of new fame for the ancient family of Peel. And in the end old Samuel promised to give George and Mary five hundred a year, so that George, as a sculptor, might begin

at the top and " succeed like success." And George went off with his bride to London whence he had come. And the old man thought he had done a very noble and a very wonderful thing, which, indeed, he had.

This had occurred when George was twenty-five.

Matters fell out rather as George had predicted. The youth almost at once obtained a commission for three hundred pounds' worth of symbolic statues for the front of the central offices of the Order of Rechabites, which particularly pleased his uncle, because Samuel Peel was a strong temperance man. And George got one or two other commissions, so that he felt himself justified in estimating his total income at seven hundred and fifty a year. It goes without saying that he spent it. His policy was to spend it. Being extravagant was to George Peel the same thing as " putting all the profits into the business " is to a manufacturer. He was extravagant and ostentatious on principle, and by far-sighted policy—or, at least, he thought that he was.

And thus the world's rumours multiplied his success, and many persons said and believed that he was making quite two thousand a year, and would be an A.R.A. before he was grey-haired. But George always related the true facts to his uncle-in-law ; he even made them out to be much less satisfactory than they really were. His favourite phrase in letters to his uncle was that he was " building," " building "—not houses, but his future reputation and success.

Then commissions fell off or grew intermittent, or were refused as being unworthy of George's dignity. And then young Georgie arrived, with his insatiable appetites and his vociferous need of doctors, nurses, perambulators, nurseries, and lacey garments. And all the time young Georgie's father kept his head high and continued to be extravagant by far-sighted policy. And the five hundred a year kept coming in regularly by quarterly instalments of a hundred and twenty-five pounds. And on many a tight morning George nearly decided that Mary must write to her uncle and ask for a little supplementary estimate. But he never did decide, partly because he was afraid and partly from sheer pride. (According to his original statements to his uncle-in-law seven years earlier, he ought at this epoch to have been in an assured position with a genuine income of thousands.)

But the state of trade worsened, and he had a cheque dishonoured. And then he won the Triennial Gold Medal. And then at length he did arrange with Mary that she should write to old Samuel and roundly ask him for an extra couple of hundred. They composed the letter together ; and they stated the reasons so well and convinced themselves so completely of the righteousness of their cause, that for a few moments they looked on the two hundred as already in hand. Hence the Heidsieck night. But on the morrow of the Heidsieck night they thought differently. And George was gloomy. He felt humiliated by the necessity of the application to his uncle—the first he had ever made. And he feared the result.

His fears were justified.

III

THEY were far more than justified. Three mornings after the first letter, to which she had made no reply, Mary received a second. It ran :

> Dear Mary,—And what is more, I shall henceforth pay you three hundred instead of five hundred a year. If George has not made a position for himself it is quite time he had. The Gold Medal must make a lot of difference to him. And if necessary you must economise. I am sure there is room for economy in your household. Champagne, for instance.
>
> Your affectionate uncle,
>
> SAMUEL PEEL.
>
> P.S.—I am, of course, acting in your best interests.—S.P.

This letter infuriated George, so much so that George the younger, observing strange symptoms on his father's face, and strange sounds issuing from his father's mouth, stopped eating in order to give the whole of his attention to them.

" Champagne ! What's he driving at ? " exclaimed George, glaring at Mary as though it was Mary who had written the letter.

" I expect he's been reading *Smart Society*," said Mary.

" Do you mean to say," George asked scornfully, " that your uncle reads a rag like that ? I thought all his lot looked down on worldliness."

" So they do," said Mary. " But they

somehow like reading about it. I believe uncle has read *Smart Society* every week for twenty years."

"Well, why didn't you tell me?"

"The other morning?"

"Yes."

"Oh! I didn't want to worry you. What good would it have done?"

"What good would it have done!" George repeated in accents of terrible disdain, as though the good that it would have done was obvious to the lowest intelligence. (Yet he knew quite well that it would have done no good at all.) "Georgie, take that spoon out of your sleeve."

And Georgie, usually disobedient, took the porridge-laden spoon out of his sleeve and glanced at his mother for moral protection. His mother merely wiped him rather roughly. Georgie thought, once more, that he never in this world should understand grown-up people. And the recurring thought made him cry gently.

George lapsed into savage meditation. During all the seven years of his married life he had somehow supposed himself to be superior, as a man, to his struggling rivals. He had regarded them with easy toleration, as from a height. And now he saw himself tumbling down among them, humiliated. Everything seemed unreal to him, then. The studio and the breakfast-room were solid; the waving trees in Regents Park were solid; the rich knick-knacks and beautiful furniture and excellent food and fine clothes were all solid enough, but they seemed most disconcertingly unreal. One letter from old Samuel had made them tremble, and the second had reduced them to illusions, or delusions. Even George's reputation as a rising sculptor appeared utterly fallacious. What rendered him savage was the awful injustice of Samuel. Samuel had no right whatever to play him such a trick. It was, in a way, worse than if Samuel had cut off the allowance altogether, for in that case he could at any rate have gone majestically to Samuel and said: "Your niece and her child are starving." But with a minimum of three hundred a year for their support three people cannot possibly starve.

"Ring the bell and have this kid taken out," said he.

Whereupon Georgie yelled.

Kate came, a starched white-and-blue young thing of sixteen.

"Kate," said George, autocratically, "take baby."

"Yes, sir," said Kate, with respectful obedience.

The girl had no notion that she was not real to her master, or that her master was saying to himself "I ought not to be ordering human beings about like this. I can't pay their wages. I ought to be starving in a garret."

When George and Mary were alone George said:

"Look here! Does he mean it?"

"You may depend he means it. It's so like him. Me asking for that two hundred must have upset him. And then seeing that about Heidsieck in the paper—he'd make up his mind all of a sudden—I know him so well."

"H'm!" snorted George. "I shall make my mind up all of a sudden too!"

"What shall you do?"

"There's one thing I shan't do," said George. "Stop here. Do you realise, my girl, that we shall be absolutely up a gum-tree?"

"I should have thought you would be able——"

"Absolute gum-tree!" George interrupted her. "Simply can't keep the shop open! To-morrow, my child, we go down to Bursley."

"Who?"

"You, me, and the infant."

"And what about the servants?"

"Send 'em home."

"But we can't descend on uncle like that without notice, and him full of his election! Besides, he's cross."

"We shan't descend on him."

"Then where shall you go?"

"We shall put up at the Tiger," said George impressively.

"The Tiger?" gasped Mary.

George had meant to stagger, and he had staggered.

"The Tiger," he iterated.

"With Georgie?"

"With Georgie."

"But what will uncle say? I shouldn't be surprised if uncle has never been in the Tiger in his life. You know his views——"

"I don't care twopence for your uncle," said George, again implicitly blaming Mary for the peculiarities of her uncle's character. "Something's got to be done, and I'm going to do it."

The Tiger and The Baby

IV

TWO days later, at about ten o'clock in the morning, Samuel Peel, J.P., entered the market-place, Bursley, from the top of Oldcastle Street. He had walked down, as usual, from his dignified residence at Hillport. It was his day for the Bench, and he had moreover a lot of complicated election business. On a dozen hoardings between Hillport and Bursley Market-place blazed the red letters of his posters inviting the faithful to vote for Peel, whose family had been identified with the district for a century and a half. He was pleased with these posters, and with the progress of canvassing. A slight and not a tall man with a feeble grey beard and bald head, he was yet a highly respected figure in the town. He had imposed himself upon the town by regular habits, strict morals, a reasonable philanthropy, and a successful career. He had, despite natural disadvantages, upheld on high the great name of Peel. So that he entered the town on that fine morning with a certain conquering jauntiness. And citizens saluted him with respect and he responded with benignity.

And as, nearly opposite that celebrated hotel, the Tiger, he was about to cross over to the eastern porch of the Town Hall, he saw a golden-haired man approaching him with a perambulator. And the sight made him pause, involuntarily. It was a strange sight. Then he recognised his nephew-in-law. And he blanched, partly from excessive astonishment, but partly from fear.

"How do, uncle?" said George nonchalantly, as though he had parted from him on the previous evening. "Just hang on to this pram a sec, will you?" And, pushing the perambulator towards Samuel Peel, J.P., George swiftly fled, and, for the perfection of his uncle-in-law's amazement, disappeared into the Tiger.

Then the occupant of the perambulator began to weep.

The figure of Samuel Peel, dressed as a Justice of the Peace should be dressed for the Bench, in a frock-coat and a ceremonious neck-tie, and (of course) spats over his spotless boots; the figure of Samuel Peel, the wrinkled and dry bachelor (who never in his life had held a saucepan of infant's food over a gas-jet in the middle of the night) this figure staring horror-struck through spectacles at the loud contents of the perambulator, soon excited attention in the Market-place of Bursley. And Mr. Peel perceived the attention.

He guessed that the babe was Mary's babe, though he was quite incapable of recognising it. And he could not imagine what George was doing with it (and the perambulator) in Bursley, nor why he had vanished so swiftly into the Tiger, nor why he had not come out again. The whole situation was in the acutest degree mysterious. It was also in the acutest degree amazing. Samuel Peel had no facility in baby-talk, so, to tranquilize Georgie, he attempted soothing strokes or pats, on such portions of Georgie's skin as were exposed. Whereupon Georgie shrieked, and even dogs stood still and lifted noses inquiringly.

Then Jos. Curtenty, very ancient but still a wag, passed by, and said:

"Hello, Mr. Peel. Truth will out. And yet who'd ha' suspected you o' being secretly married!"

Samuel Peel could not take offence, because Jos. Curtenty, besides being old and an alderman and an ex-Mayor, was an important member of his election committee. Of course, such a friendly joke from an incurable joker like Jos. Curtenty was all right; but supposing enemies began to joke on similar lines—how he might be prejudiced at the polls! It was absurd, totally absurd, to conceive Samuel Peel in any other relation than that of an uncle to a baby; yet the more absurd a slander the more eagerly it was believed, and a slander, once started, could never be overtaken.

What on earth was George Peel doing in Bursley with that baby? Why had he not announced his arrival? Where was the baby's mother? Where was their luggage? Why, in the name of reason, had George vanished so swiftly into the Tiger, and what in the name of decency and sobriety was he doing in the Tiger such a prodigious time?

It occurred to him that possibly George had written to him, and the letter had miscarried.

But in that case, where had they slept the previous night? They could not have come down from London that morning; it was too early.

Little Georgie persevered in the production of yells that might have been heard as far as the Wesleyan Chapel, and certainly as far as the Conservative Club.

Then Mr. Duncalf, the Town Clerk, went by, from his private office towards the

Town Hall, and saw the singular spectacle of the public man and the perambulator. Mr. Duncalf, too, was a bachelor.

"So you've come down to see 'em," said Mr. Duncalf gruffly, pretending that the baby was not there.

"See whom?"

"Well, your niece and her husband, of course."

"Where are they?" asked Mr. Peel, without having sufficiently considered the consequences of his question.

"Aren't they in the Tiger?" said Mr. Duncalf. "They put up there yesterday afternoon, anyhow. But naturally you know that."

He departed, nodding. The baby's extraordinary noise incommoded him and seemed somehow to make him blush if he stood near it.

Mr. Peel did not gasp. It is at least two centuries since men gasped from astonishment. Nevertheless, Mr. Duncalf with those careless words had simply knocked the breath out of him. Never, never would he have guessed, even in the wildest surmise, that Mary and her husband and child would sleep at the Tiger! The thought unmanned him. What! A baby at the Tiger!

Let it not be imagined for a moment that the Tiger is not an utterly respectable hotel. It is, always was, always will be. No faintest slur had ever been cast upon its licence. Still, it had a bar and a barmaid, and indubitably people drank at the bar. When a prominent man took to drink (as prominent men sometimes did), people would say: "He's always nipping into the Tiger!" Or: "You'll see him at the Tiger before eleven o'clock in the morning!" Hence to Samuel Peel, total abstainer and temperance reformer, the Tiger, despite its vast respectability and the reputation of its eighteenpenny ordinary, was a place of sin, a place of contamination; briefly, a "gin palace," if not a "gaming-saloon." On principle, Samuel Peel (as his niece suspected) had never set foot in the Tiger. The thought that his great-nephew and his niece had actually slept there horrified him.

And further and worse; what would people say about Samuel Peel's relatives having to stop at the Tiger while Samuel Peel's large house up at Hillport was practically empty? Would they not deduce family quarrels, feuds, scandals? The situation was appalling.

He glanced about, but he did not look high enough to see that George was watching him from a second-floor window of the Tiger, and he could not hear Mary imploring George: "Do for goodness sake go back to him." Ladies passed along the pavement, stifling their curiosity. At the back of the Town Hall there began to collect the usual crowd of idlers who interested themselves in the sittings of the police-court.

Then Georgie bored with weeping, dropped off into slumber. Samuel Peel saw that he could not, with dignity, lift the perambulator up the steps into the porch of the Tiger, and so he began to wheel it cautiously down the side-entrance into the Tiger yard. And in the yard he met George, just emerging from the side-door, on whose lamp is written the word "Billiards."

"So sorry to have troubled you, uncle. But the wife's unwell, and I'd forgotten something. Asleep, is he?"

George spoke in a matter-of-fact tone, with no hint whatever that he bore ill will against Samuel Peel for having robbed him of two hundred a year. And Samuel felt as though he had robbed George of two hundred a year.

"But—but," asked Samuel. "What are you doing here?"

"We're stopping here," said George. "I've come down to look out for some work—modelling, or anything I can get hold of. I shall begin a round of the manufacturers this afternoon. We shall stay here till I can find furnished rooms, or a cheap house. It's all up with sculpture now, you know."

"Why! I thought you were doing excellently. That medal——"

"Yes. In reputation. But it was just now that I wanted money for a big job, and—and—well, I couldn't have it. So there you are. Seven years wasted. But of course, it was better to cut the loss. I never pretend that things aren't what they are. Mind you, I'm not blaming you, uncle. You're no doubt hard up like other people."

"But—but," Samuel began stammering again, "why didn't you come straight to me—instead of here?"

George put on a confidential look.

"The fact is," said he. "Mary wouldn't. She's vexed. You know how women are. They never understand things—especially money."

"Vexed with me?"

"Yes."

"But why?" Again Samuel felt like a culprit.

"I fancy it must be something you said in your letter concerning champagne."

"It was only what I read about you in a paper."

"I supposed so. But she thinks you meant it to insult her. She thinks you must have known perfectly well that we simply asked the reporter to put champagne in because it looks well—seems very flourishing you know."

"Do you mean to say *Smart Society* would do a thing like that?" demanded Samuel Peel.

"Oh, yes!" laughed George. "Half-a-sovereign to the reporter chap—and it's done."

One of Samuel's dearest illusions was smashed.

"I must see Mary," said he. "Of course the idea of you staying on here is perfectly ridiculous, perfectly ridiculous. What do you suppose people will say?"

"I'd like you to see her," said George. "I wish you would. You may be able to do what I can't. You'll find her in Room 14. She's all dressed. But I warn you she's in a fine state."

"You'd better come, too," said Samuel.

George lifted Georgie out of the perambulator.

"Here," said George. "Suppose you carry him to her."

Samuel hesitated, and yielded. And the strange procession started upstairs.

In two hours a cab was taking all the Peels to Hillport.

In two days George and his family were returning to London, sure of the continuance of five hundred a year, and with a gift of two hundred supplementary cash.

But it was long before Bursley ceased to talk of George Peel and his family putting up at the Tiger. And it was still longer before the barmaid ceased to describe to her favourite customers the incredible spectacle of Samuel Peel, J.P., stumbling up the stairs of the Tiger with an infant in his arms.

Smart Society lost a subscriber of twenty years' standing.

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The Curious Case of John Mistletoe

An amazing deal in "first editions" and its climax

By CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

WE had been dining together at the Hotel Ansonia, and as we walked up the shining breezy channel of Broadway my friend, Dove Dulcet (the well-known poet and literary agent), vigorously expounded a theorem which I afterwards had occasion to remember.

"There is every reason," he cried, "why a poet should be the best of detectives! My boy, there is a rhyme in events as well as in words. When you see two separate and apparently unconnected happenings that seem (as one might say) to rhyme together, you begin to suspect one author behind them both. It is the function of the poet to have a quick and tender apprehension of similarities. The root of poetry is nothing else than describing things as being like other apparently different things. The lady who compared herself to a bird in a gilded cage was chaffed for her opulent and spendthrift imagination; but in that lively simile she showed an understanding of the poetic principle. Look here: what is the commonest phrase of the detectives? To put two and two together. What else, I ask you, is the poet doing all the time but putting two and two together—two rhymes, and then two rhymes more, and making a quatrain."

He swung his stick, puffed strongly at his cigar, and amorously surveyed the deep blue of the night, against which the huge blocks of apartment houses spread their random patterns of lighted windows. Between these granolithic cliffs flowed a racing stream of bright motors, like the rapids of a river of light hurrying downward to the whirlpool of Times Square.

"Either for a poet or for a detective," he said, gaily, "this seems to me the ideal region. I tell you, I walk about here suspecting the most glorious crimes. When I see the number of banana splits that are consumed in these glittering drug-stores, I feel sure that somewhere, in the purple silences of the night, hideous consequences must follow. Those who feed so violently on that brutalizing mixture of banana, chocolate ice cream, cherry syrup, and whipped marshmallow, must certainly be gruesome at heart. I look out of my window late at night toward the scattered lights of that vast pile of apartments, always thinking to see them blaze some great golden symbol or letter into the darkness, some terrible or obscene code that means death and terror."

"Your analogy seems to have some sense," I said. "Certainly the minor poet, like the law breaker, loves to linger about the scene of his rhyme, or crime."

"You are an amateur of puns," he replied. "Then let me tell you the motto I have coined to express the spirit of this Little White Way—*Ein feste bourgeois ist unser Gott.* This is the proud kingdom of the triumphant middle class. It is a perilous country for a poet. If he were found out, he would be martyred at the nearest subway station. But how I love it! See how the quiet side streets cut across highways so richly contrasting: West End Avenue, leafy, expensive, and genteel; Broadway, so gloriously cruel and artificial; Amsterdam Avenue, so honestly and poignantly real. My club is the Hartford Lunch Room, where they call an omelet an *omulet*, and where the mystic word *Combo* resounds through the hatchway to the fat man in the kitchen. My church is the St. Agnes branch of the Public Library, over on Amsterdam Avenue. In those cool, quiet rooms, when I watch the pensive readers, I have a sense of treading near an artery of fine human idealism. In all this various neighbourhood I have a cheerful conviction that almost anything might

happen. In the late afternoons, when the crosswise streets end on a glimpse of the Jersey bluffs that glow like smoky blue opals, and smell like rotten apples, I feel myself on the very doorsill of the most stunning outrages."

We both laughed, and turned off on Seventy-seventh Street to the small apartment house where Dulcet had a comfortable suite of two rooms and bath. In his book-lined sitting-room we lit our pipes and sat down for a gossip.

We had been talking at dinner of the extraordinary number of grievous deaths of well-known authors that had happened that year. As it is almost unnecessary to remind you, there was Dunraven Bleak, the humorous essayist, who was found stark (in both senses) in his bath tub; and Cynthia Carboy, the famous writer of bedtime stories, who fell down the elevator shaft. In the case of Mrs. Carboy, the police were distracted because her body was found at the top of the building, and the detective bureau insisted that in some unexplainable manner she must have fallen *up* the shaft; but as Dulcet pointed out at the time of the Authors' League inquiry, the body might have been carried upstairs after the accident. Then there was Andrew Baffle, the psychological novelist, whose end was peculiarly atrocious and miserable, because it seemed that he had contracted tetanus from handling a typewriter ribbon that showed signs of having been poisoned. Frank Lebanon, the brilliant short-story writer, was stabbed in the fulness of his powers; and there were others whom I do not recall at the moment. Mr. Dulcet had suffered severely by these sad occurrences, for a number of these authors were his clients, and the loss of the commissions on the sale of their work was a serious item. The secret of these tragedies had never been discovered, and there had been something of a panic among members of the Authors' League. The rumour of a pogrom among best-selling writers was tactfully hushed.

"What is your friend John Mistletoe writing nowadays?" I asked, as I looked along Dulcet's shelves. Mistletoe, the brilliant novelist, was probably Dulcet's most distinguished client, an eccentric fellow who, in spite of his excellent royalties, lived a solitary and modest existence in a boarding-house somewhere in that part of the West Side. Outside his own circle of intimates Dulcet was almost the only man whom Mistletoe saw much of, and many of us, who admired the novelist's work, had our only knowledge of his person from hearing the agent talk of him.

"By George, I'm glad you reminded me," said Dulcet. "Why, he has just finished a story, and he telephoned me this afternoon asking me to step over to his house this evening to get the manuscript. He never has any dealings with the editors on his own hook—likes me to attend to all his business arrangements for him. I said I'd run over there about ten o'clock."

"That last book of his was a great piece of work," I said. "I've been following his stuff for over ten years, and he looks to me about the most promising fellow we've got. He has something of the Barrie touch, it seems to me."

"Yes, he's the real thing," said Dulcet, blowing a blue cloud of his Cartesian Mixture. "I only wish he were not quite so eccentric. He lives like a hermit-crab, over in a lodging-house near the Park. Even I, who know him as well as most people, never feel like intruding on him except when he asks me to. I can't help thinking it would be good for him to get out more and see something of other men in his line of work. I tried to get him to join The Snails, but he says that Amsterdam Avenue is his only amusement. And Central Park seems to be his country club. I wonder if you've noticed that in his tales whenever he wants to describe a bit of country he takes it right out of the Park. I sometimes suspect that's the only scenery he knows."

"He has attained a very unusual status among writers," I said. "In my rambles among bookshops I have noticed that his first editions bring quite a good price. It's very seldom that a writer—at any rate an American—gets 'collected' during his lifetime."

"Did you ever see any of his manuscript?" asked Dulcet; and on my shaking my head, he took out a thick packet of foolscap from a cabinet.

"This is the original of 'Girlhood,'" he explained. "Mistletoe gave it to me. It'll be worth a lot some day."

I looked with interest at the neatly written sheets, thickly covered with a small, beautiful, and rather crabbed penmanship.

"Worth a lot!" I exclaimed. "Well, I should say so! Why the other day I was

browsing round in a bookshop and I found a lot of his first editions marked at fifteen dollars each. It struck me as a very high price, for I know I have seen them listed for three or four dollars in catalogues."

"Exorbitantly high," Dulcet said. "I'm afraid your bookseller is profiteering. I admire Mistletoe as much as any one, but that is an artificial price. The firsts aren't rare enough to warrant any such price as that. Still, I'm glad to know about it as it's a sign of growing recognition. I remember the time when it was all I could do to get any editors to look at his things. I'll have to tell him about that, it will please him mightily."

We sat for a while chatting about this and that and then Dulcet got up and put on his hat.

"Look here, old man," he said. "You squat here and be comfortable while I run round to Mistletoe. It won't take me more than a few minutes—he lives on Eighty-second Street. I'll be back right speedily, and we can go on with our talk."

I heard him go down in the elevator, and then I relit my pipe, and picked out a book from one of his shelves. I remember that it was Brillat-Savarin's amusing "Gastronomy as a Fine Art." I smiled at finding this in Dulcet's library, for I knew that the agent rather prided himself on being something of a gourmet, and I was reading the essays of the jovial French epicure with a good deal of relish when the telephone rang. I went to it with that slight feeling of embarrassment one always has in answering someone else's phone.

To my surprise, it was Dulcet's voice.

"Hullo?" he said. "That you, Ben? Listen, I want you to come round to Mistletoe's right away," and he gave the address.

Thinking he had arranged a chance for me to meet Mistletoe (I had long wanted to do so), I felt hesitant about intruding; but he repeated his message rather sharply. "Please come at once," he said. "It's important." Again he gave the street number, made me promise to come immediately, and rang off.

It was nearly half-past ten, and the streets were fairly quiet as I walked briskly along. The house was one of a row of old cocoa-coloured stone dwellings, and evidently someone was watching for me, for while I was trying to read the numbers a door opened and from a dark hall an arm beckoned to me. I went up the tall steps and a stout woman, who seemed to be in some agitation, whispered my name interrogatively. "Is this Mr. Trovato?" she murmured.

"Yes," I said, puzzled.

"Third floor front," she said, and I creaked quietly up the stairs.

I tapped at the front room on the top floor, and Dulcet opened.

"Thank goodness you're here, Ben," he said. "Something has happened."

It was a large, comfortable room, crowded with books on three walls, furnished with easy chairs and a couch in one corner. A brilliant blaze of light from several bulbs under a frosted hood poured upon a reading table in the middle of the room. Sitting at this table, in a Windsor chair, slumped down into the seat, was a short stout man whose head lolled sideways over his chest. He was wearing a tweed suit and a soft shirt, and looked as though he had fallen asleep at his work. In front of him were some books and a can of tobacco. I recognised him, of course, from the photographs I had often seen. It was Mistletoe.

I looked at Dulcet, aghast. But, as always at such moments, what was uppermost in my mind was something trivial and irrelevant. I had an intense desire to open a window. The air in that room was thick and foggy, a sort of close, strangling frowst of venomously strong tobacco and furnace gas. After the clear elixir of the wintry night it was loathsome. It was the typical smell that hangs about the rooms of literary bachelors, who work all day long in a room without ever thinking of airing it.

"Yes," he said. "He's dead. Pretty awful, isn't it? I found him like this when I got here. No sign of injury as far as I can see."

There was something profoundly dreadful in this first sight, as mere sagging clay, of the brilliant and powerful writer whose books I had so long admired, and whom I had thought of as one of the strong and fortunate few who shape human perplexities to their own ends. I looked down at him with a miserable blackness in my spirit, and laid a hand on Dulcet's shoulder in sympathy.

"I've sent for a doctor," he said. "Before he comes I want to get all the information I can from the landlady. I wanted to have you here as a witness. I haven't touched anything."

The woman had followed me upstairs, and stood crying quietly in the doorway.

" Come in, Mrs. Barlow," said Dulcet. " Now please tell us everything you can about where Mr. Mistletoe went this evening, and anything that has happened."

Mrs. Barlow, who seemed to be a good-hearted, simple-minded creature, snuffled wretchedly. " Oh dear, oh dear," she said. " He was such a nice gentleman, too. Let me see, he went out about seven, I suppose for his supper, but he was always irregular about his meals, you never could tell; sometimes he would eat in the middle of the afternoon, and sometimes not till late at night. I always would urge him that he would die of indigestion, but he was so kind-hearted."

" You don't know where he went ? " said Dulcet.

" Perhaps he went round to the laundry," she said, " for he had a parcel with him, which I took to be his laundry because he usually took it out on Monday evenings because by that time the clean shirt he put on on Sunday was ready to go to the wash. I hate to think that in all the years he lived in this house his laundry was the only thing we ever had a difference about, because I used to have it done in the house for him, but he said my wash-woman tore the buttons off his shirts or collars or something, so a little while ago he started taking his things out to be done, but I don't know where because he used to call for them himself."

" You haven't any idea where he used to eat ? " insisted Dulcet.

" Oh, no, sir, he liked to go to different places, you know yourself how he was always a bit queer and concentric, and he never talked much about where he went, but always so nice and considerate. Oh, he *was* a fine gentleman."

Mrs. Barlow, plainly much grieved, wept anew.

" Please try to tell us everything you can think of," said Dulcet, gently. " What time did he come in, and did you notice anything unusual ? "

" Nothing out of the way that I can think of, but then I was down in the basement most of the evening, for I let my maid go to the movies and I had a deal to do. I suppose he went along Amsterdam Avenue, he was always strolling up and down Amsterdam or Columbus, poor man, getting ideas for his literature I guess. He came back about nine o'clock I should say, because I heard the door about then. Just a few minutes before he came in there was a man came to the door with a tin of tobacco for him, which he said Mr. Mistletoe had ordered sent around, and I took it up and put it on his table, there it is now, poor man, Carter's Mixture."

Mrs. Barlow pointed to the tin of Cartesian Mixture that stood on the table. Evidently it had only just been opened, for it was practically full.

" Yes," said Dulcet. " Here's his pipe lying on the floor under his chair." He picked up the briar and glanced at it. " Only just begun to smoke it, for the tobacco is hardly burned. He must have been smoking when he. . . . There wasn't anything else you can think of ? "

The woman dried her eyes with her apron. " There was just one other thing I noticed, but I suppose it's silly. But I took note of it special, because I thought I had heard it before, lately. While he was out, and a little before the man brought the tin of tobacco, I heard a sharp tapping out on the street in front of the house. I noticed it special, because I thought at first it was someone rapping on the door, and I wondered if the bell was out of order again, but when I went I couldn't see any one. But I wondered about it because I heard it two or three times, a sharp kind of tapping, it sounded some way like hitting on stone with a stick of some sort."

Dulcet and I looked at each other rather blankly.

" And after that," she went on, " I didn't think about anything one way or another till you came in and I told you to go right up."

There was a clear peal from the front door bell.

" That's the doctor," said Dulcet, and Mrs. Barlow hurried downstairs.

I have never seen anyone so brisk and matter of fact as that physician, and after his arrival the affair seemed to pass out of Dulcet's hands into the painful official machinery that takes charge in such events. Dulcet, acting as the dead writer's literary representative, went into the adjoining room, which was Mistletoe's study, to look over the papers in the desk for any manuscripts that he ought to take care of. He wrote out a list of friends and relatives for me to send telegrams to, and I went out to attend to this. I don't know how they get

wind of these affairs, but the reporters were already beginning to arrive when I left.

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THE next day, and for several days afterward, the papers all carried long stories about poor Mistletoe's brilliant career. Then the literary weeklies took it up. At the libraries and bookshops everyone was asking for his books, and I have never seen a more depressing illustration of the familiar fact that a writer's real fame never comes until it is too late to do him any good. Editors and people who had hardly been aware of Mistletoe's genius while he was alive now praised him fluently, speaking of him as "America's most honest realist," and all that sort of thing. Moving-picture people began inquiring about the film rights of his novels. Some of the sensational newspapers tried to play up his death as a mystery story, but the physicians asserted heart failure as the cause, and this aspect of the matter soon subsided.

Except at the funeral, which was attended by a great many literary people, I did not see Dulcet for some days. I gathered from what I read in the news that Mistletoe's will had appointed him executor of his literary property, and I knew that he must have much to attend to. But one afternoon the telephone rang, and Dulcet asked me if I could knock off work and come round to see him. As I was living up town at that time, it only took me a few minutes to go round to his apartment. I found him smoking a pipe as usual, and looking pale and fagged. He welcomed me with his affectionate cordiality, and I sat down to hear what was on his mind.

"You must excuse me if I'm a little upset," he said. "I've just had an interview with a ghoul. A fellow came in to see me who had heard that I have a number of poor Mistletoe's books and manuscripts. He wanted to buy them from me, offered big prices for them. He said that since Mistletoe's death all his first editions and so on have gone up enormously in value. Apparently he expected me to do trading over the dead body of a friend."

He smoked awhile in silence, and then said:

"Sorry not to have seen you sooner, but to tell the truth I've had my hands full. His brother, who was the nearest kin, couldn't come from Ohio on account of serious illness, and everything fell on me. I had to pack up all his things and ship them, all that sort of business. But I've been wanting to talk to you about it, because I'm convinced there was something queer about the whole affair. I'm not satisfied with that heart-failure verdict. That's absurd. There was nothing wrong with his heart that I ever heard of. It's very unfortunate that for the first few days I was too occupied with urgent matters to be able to follow up the various angles of the affair. But I've been turning it over in my mind, and I've got some ideas I'd like to share with you. You remember what I told you, with unfortunate levity, about the secret of detective work being ability to notice the unsuspected rhymes in events? Well, there are one or two features of this affair that seem to me to rhyme together in a very sinister fashion. Wait a minute until I put on my other coat, and we'll go out."

He went into his bedroom. I had not liked to interrupt him, but I was yearning for a smoke, for leaving my rooms in a hurry I had forgotten to bring my pouch with me. On his mantelpiece I saw a tin of tobacco, and began to fill my pipe. To my surprise, just as I was taking out a match he darted out of the bedroom, uttered an exclamation, and snatched the briar from my hand.

"Sorry," he said, bluntly, "but you mustn't smoke that. It's something very special." He opened his penknife, scraped out the weed I had put in the bowl, and carefully put it back in the tin. He took the tin and locked it in his desk.

"Try some of this," he said, handing his pouch.

I concluded that the tension of the past days had troubled his nerves. This rudeness was so unlike him that I knew there must be some explanation, but he offered none. As we went down in the elevator he said: "The question is, can you make a rhyme out of tobacco and collar buttons?"

"No," I said, a little peevishly. "And I don't believe anyone could, except Edward Lear."

"Well," he continued, "that's what we've got to do. And don't imagine that it's merely a nonsense rhyme, any more than Lear's were. Edward Lear was as great as King Lear, in his own way."

He led me to Eighty-second Street. The December afternoon was already dark as we approached Mrs. Barlow's house. At the foot of her front steps he halted and turned to me.

"Is your pipe going?" he said.

"No," I said, irritably. "It's out. And I haven't any tobacco."

"Don't be surly, old chap; I'll give you some if you'll tell me what you do when your pipe goes out."

"Why, you idiot," I cried, "I do this." And I knocked out the ashes by striking the bowl smartly against the palm of my hand.

"Ah," he said. "But some people do this." He bent down and rapped his pipe against the stone ramp of the steps, with a clear, sharp, hollow sound.

"Yes, a good way to break a nice pipe," I was remarking, when the basement door of the house flew open, and Mrs. Barlow darted out into the sunken area just below the pavement level. In the pale lemon-coloured glare of a near-by street lamp we could see that she was strongly excited.

"Good gracious," she panted. "Is it Mr. Dulcet? Oh, sir, you did give me a turn. Oh, dear, that was just the tapping sound I heard the night poor Mr. Mistletoe died. What was it? Did you hear it?"

"Like this?" said Dulcet, knocking his pipe again on the stone step.

"That was it, exactly," she said. "What a fright, to be sure! Was it only someone knocking his pipe like that? Oh, dear, it did bring back that horrid evening, just as plain."

"So much for the mysterious death rap," said Dulcet as we walked back toward Amsterdam Avenue. "I can't claim much ingenuity for that, however. You see, the morning after Mistletoe's death I went round to Mrs. Barlow's early, before she had been out to sweep her pavement. The first thing I noticed, by the lowest step, was a little dottle of tobacco such as falls from a half-smoked pipe when it is knocked out. That seemed to me to make a perfect couplet with Mrs. Barlow's tale of the tapping she had heard. She heard it several times, you remember, in a short space of time. That suggests to me someone standing on the street, or walking up and down, in a state of nervousness, because he didn't smoke any of his pipes through. When they were only half smoked he knocked them out, in sheer impatience. Was he waiting for someone?"

"Perhaps it was Mistletoe himself?" I suggested.

"I don't think so," he said. "Because, in the first place, nervousness was the last thing I would associate with his temperament, which was calm and collected in the extreme. And also, he always smoked Brown Eyed Blend, and had done so for years. That was the first thing that struck me as unusual the night we were there—that tin of Cartesian on the table. He was a man of fixed habits; why should he have made a change just that night? I picked up the little wad of tobacco I found lying on the step, and took it carefully home. It's Cartesian, or I'm a Dutchman. So item one in our criminal rhyme-scheme is: Find me a nervous man smoking Cartesian."

"It's a bit fanciful," I objected.

"Of course it is," he cried. "But crime is a fanciful thing. Ever let the fancy roam, as Keats said. What the deuce is the line that follows? Suppose we stroll down Amsterdam Avenue and find a new place to have dinner."

"Poor old Mistletoe," he said, as we walked along admiring the lighted caves of the shopwindows. "How he enjoyed all this. You know, there is a certain honest simplicity about Amsterdam Avenue's merchandising that is pleasant to contemplate after the shining sophistications of Broadway. In a Broadway delicatessen window you'll see such horrid luxuries as jars of cocks' combs in jelly; whereas along here the groceries show candid and heartening signs such as this: 'Coming Back to The Old Times, 17c lb. Sugar.' Amsterdam Avenue shopkeepers speak with engaging directness about their traffic; for instance, there's a barber at the corner of Eighty-first Street who embosses on his window the legend: 'Yes, We Do Buster Brown Hair Cutting.' That sort of thing is very humane and genuine, that's why Mistletoe was so fond of it. There's a laundry along here somewhere that I have often noticed; it calls itself the Fastidious Laundry——"

"Speaking of laundries," I said, "what do you think of this?" We stopped, and I pointed to a neatly lettered placard in a window which had caught my eye. It said:

NOTICE TO ARTISTS AND AUTHORS
WE SEW BUTTONS ON SOFT COLLARS
FREE OF CHARGE

"By Jove," I said, "there's a laundry that has the right idea. I think I'll bring my——"

I broke off when I saw my companion's face. He was leaning forward toward the pane, and his eyes were bright but curiously

empty, as though in some way the mechanism of sight had been reversed, and he was looking inward rather than out.

"That's very odd," he said, presently. "I've been up and down this street many times, but I never noticed that sign before."

He turned and marched into the shop, and I followed. In the soft steamy air several girls were ironing shirts, and a plump, pink-cheeked Hebrew stood behind a counter wrapping up bundles.

"I noticed your sign in the window," said Dulcet. "What do you charge for laundering soft collars?"

"Five cents each, but we mend them, too, and sew on the buttons."

"That's a good idea," said Dulcet, genially. "I wish I'd known that before; I'd have brought my collars round to you. How long have you been doing that? I often go by here, but I never saw the sign before."

"Only about a week," the man replied. "Let's see—a week ago last Monday I put that sign up. You wouldn't believe how much new trade it has brought in. I thought it would be a kind of a joke—the man next door suggested it, and I put it in to please him. But 'most everybody wears soft collars nowadays, and it seems good business."

"The man next door?" said Dulcet, in a casual tone.

"Sure, the cigar store."

"Is his name Stork?" said Dulcet, reflectively.

"Stork? Why, no, Basswood. What do you mean, Stork?"

"I mean," said Dulcet, slowly, "does he ever stand on one leg?"

"Quit your kidding," cried the laundryman, annoyed.

"I assure you, I do not trifle," said Dulcet, gravely. "I'll bring you in some collars to fix up for me. Much obliged."

We went out again, and my companion stood for a moment in front of the laundry window, looking thoughtfully at the sign.

"While you ponder, old son," I said, "I'll run into Mr. Stork-Basswood's and get some tobacco."

He seized my arm in a firm and painful clutch and whispered, "Look at the corner!"

The laundry was the second shop from the corner. Under the lamp-post at the angle of the street I saw, to my amazement, a man standing balanced on one leg. Directly under the light, he was partly in shadow, and I could only see him in silhouette, but the absurd profile of his one-legged attitude afflicted me with a renewed sense of absurdity and irritation. Dulcet, I thought, had evidently suffered some serious stroke in the region of his wits.

"Now," he said, softly, "can you see any rhyme between soft collars and standing on one leg?"

As he spoke, we both started, for somewhere near us on the street there sounded a sharp tapping, a ringing hollow wooden sound. Evidently it came from the one-legged man. This was too much for my composure. I broke away from Dulcet and ran to the corner. As I got there the one-legged creature put down a concealed limb and stood solidly on two feet, in a state of normalcy, as an eminent statesman would say. I was confused, and said angrily to the man:

"Here, you mustn't stand like that, on the public street you know, on one leg. It's setting a bad example."

To my amazement he made no retort whatever, but turned and scuttled hastily down the avenue, disappearing in the crowds that were doing their evening marketing.

"My dear fellow," said Dulcet, calmly, coming up to me, "you shouldn't have done that. You've very nearly spoilt it all. Come on, let's go in and get your tobacco."

Basswood's proved to be one of those interesting combination tobacco, stationery, toy, and book-shops which are so common on the Upper West Side. I have often noticed that these places are by no means unfruitful as hunting ground for books, because the dealers are wholly ignorant of literature and sometimes one may find on their shelves some forgotten volume that has been there for years, and which they will gladly part with for a song. A good many of these stores have, tucked away at the back, a shabby stock of circulating library volumes that have come down through many changes of proprietorship. Only the other day I saw in just such a place first editions of Kenneth Grahame's "The Golden Age" and Arthur Machen's "The Three Impostors," which the storekeeper was delighted to sell for fifteen cents each.

A dark young man was behind the tobacco counter, and from him I got a packet of my usual blend.

"Mr. Basswood in?" said Dulcet.

"Just stepped out," said the young man.

We lit our pipes and looked round the shop, glancing at the magazines and the queer miscellany of books. As it was approaching Christmas time there was a profuse assortment of those dreadful little bibelots that go by the name of "gift books," among which were the usual copies of "Recessional" and "Vampire", Thoreau's "Friendship," and "Ballads of a Cheechako," bound in what the trade calls "padded ooze." I was particularly heartened to observe that one of these atrocities, called "As a Man Thinketh," was described on the box (for all such books come in little cardboard cases) as being bound in antique yap. This pleased me so much that I was about to call Dulcet's attention to it when I saw that he was looking at me from the rear of the store with a spark in his eye. I approached and found that he was staring at a doorway partly concealed by a pile of Christmas toys and novelties. Over this door was a sign:

J. Basswood, Rare Book Department.

"Can we go in and look at the rare books?" said Dulcet.

"Sure thing," said the young man. "Help yourself. The boss'll be back soon, if you want to buy anything."

Mr. Basswood was evidently a man of some literary discretion. To our amazement we found, in a dark little room lined with shelves, a judicious assortment of modern books, several hundred volumes, and all first editions or autographed copies. The prices were marked in cipher, so we could not tell whether there were any bargains among them, but I know that I saw several particularly rare and desirable things which I would have been glad to have.

"Good heavens," I said to Dulcet, "friend Basswood is a real collector. There isn't a thing here that isn't of prime value."

He was staring at a shelf in the corner, and I went over to see what he had found.

"Upon my soul," I cried, "look at the Mistletoes! Not merely one copy of each, but three or four! This man must have specialised in Mistletoes."

"Not only that," said Dulcet, "but he has three of 'The Autogenesis of a Novelist,' the first thing that Mistletoe wrote. It was privately printed, and afterward suppressed. It's devilish rare; even I haven't got a copy. I wish I knew what prices he asks for these things."

"Look at this," I said. "Perhaps this will tell us." I picked up one of a pile of pamphlets that were lying in a large sheet of wrapping paper in a corner of the room. It was evidently a new catalogue of Mr. Basswood's rare books, that had just come from the printer.

"Here we are," I said, turning over the leaves. "Look at this."

Special Note

Fine Collection of Mistletonia: J. Basswood wishes to call particular attention to the Mistletonia listed below. Anticipating the growing interest in collectors' items of this great writer's work, J. Basswood has taken pains to gather a stock of first editions and presentation copies which is absolutely unique. The prices of these items, while high, are a fair index of the appreciation in which this author's work is held among connoisseurs. All are copies in good condition and their authenticity is guaranteed.

November 15, 19——.

Dulcet seized the catalogue and ran his eye down the pages.

"'Girlhood,' first edition, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1901, $100," he read. "'The Nuisance of Being Loved,' first edition, $75. 'The Princess Quarrelsome,' $90. 'The Anatomy of Cheerfulness,' autographed copy, $150. 'Distemper,' acting copy, signed by the author and Richard Mansfield, $200.

"Why," he cried, shrilly, "this is madness! I am in touch with all the dealers in this sort of thing, and I know the proper prices. This man has multiplied them by ten." He thrust the catalogue into his pocket and glared round at the musty shelves.

"I suppose it's due to poor Mistletoe's death," I said. I saw that Dulcet was overwrought, and suggested that we go out and get some supper.

"Supper?" he said. "A good idea. I know a place on Broadway where we can get some guinea pigs." He strode out of the store and I followed, wondering what next. He seized my arm and hurried me along Seventy-ninth Street to Broadway.

¶

IN the clear blue of the evening that blazing gully of light seemed to foam and bubble with preposterous fire. Chop suey restaurants threw out crawling streamers of red and yellow brilliance; against the peacock green of the western sky the queer

church at the corner of Seventy-ninth, with the oriental pinnacle and truncated belfry rising above its solid Baptist wings, seemed like the offspring of some reckless marriage of two infatuated architects, one Jewish and one Calvinist. It was a fitting silhouette, I thought, congruent with an evening of such wild humours. Guinea pigs for supper, how original and enlivening! "Are guinea pigs properly kosher?" I asked sarcastically.

Dulcet paid no heed, but, holding my arm, urged me along the pavement to an animal shop on the western side of Broadway. The window was full of puppies and long-haired cats. All down the aisle of the establishment were tiers of birdcages, covered with curtains while the birds slept. In lucid bowls persevering goldfish pursued their glittering and unprofitable round.

"Those guinea pigs I ordered," said Dulcet to the man, "are they ready?"

"All ready, sir," he said, and took out a cage from under the counter. "Very fine pigs, sir, strong and hearty; they will stand a great deal."

"Yes," I said, with a wild desire to shout with laughter. "But will they stand being eaten? They will find that rather trying, I fancy."

Dulcet tapped his forehead, and the dealer smiled indulgently. My companion took the cage, paid some money, and sped outdoors again. I made no further comment and in a few minutes we were in Dulcet's apartment.

"You have no kitchenette here, have you?" I protested. "Or do we devour them raw? Oh, I see, you have a camp oven. How ingenious!"

He had put on the table a large tin box. With complete seriousness he now produced a small spirit lamp, over which he fitted a little basket of fine wire mesh. When the flame of the lamp was lit, it played upon the basket, which was supported by legs at just the right height. He now put the unsuspecting guinea pigs into the tin box, which was shaped like a rural-free-delivery letter-box, with a hinged door opening at one end. He took the spirit lamp with its attached basket and pushed the contraption carefully into the box with the pigs. Then he opened both windows in the room.

"Admirable!" I exclaimed. "Like those much-advertised cigarettes, they will be toasted. But won't it take a long time?"

"Don't be an ass," he said.

He went to his desk, and took out the tin of Cartesian Mixture he had snatched away from me earlier in the evening.

"Your mention of those cigarettes is apt," he said, "for in this case also the fuel is tobacco. Please go over by the window, and stay there."

I watched, somewhat impressed by the gravity of his manner. From the tin of tobacco he took a small pinch of mixture and carefully placed it in the mesh basket above the lamp. Reaching into the box, he lit the wick of the lamp with a match, and hastily clapped to the hinged lid. The guinea pigs seemed to be awed by these proceedings, for they remained quiet. Dulcet joined me at the window, and remarked that fresh air was a fine thing.

We waited for about five minutes, while the guinea-pig oven stood quietly on the table.

"Well," said Dulcet, finally, "we ought to be able to see whether it rhymes or not."

He snatched open the door of the tin box, and skipped away from it in a way that seemed to me perfectly insane. He picked up a pair of tongs from the fireplace, and standing at a distance, lifted out the lamp. The tobacco was smoking strongly in its mesh basket. Holding the lamp away from him with the tongs, he carried it into the bathroom, and I heard him turn on the water. Then, coming back, he inserted the tongs into the tin box, and gingerly withdrew first one guinea pig and then the other. Both were calm as possible, quite dead. Looking over the sill to see that the pavement was clear, he threw the tin box into the street, where it fell with a crash.

"Surely they're not cooked already?" I said.

"I haven't heard from the doctor yet," he said; "but he promised to ring me up this evening. I'm awfully sorry to have delayed your dinner, old man. Meet me at the Lucerne grill room, Seventy-ninth and Amsterdam Avenue, to-morrow evening at seven o'clock and we'll eat together. You've been a great help to me."

"I hope the doctor is a mental specialist," I said; but he pushed me gently out of the room. "We'll finish our rhyme at dinner to-morrow evening."

I went out into the night, and sorrowfully visited a Hartford Lunch.

The next evening I was at the Lucerne grill promptly. This modest chop house was one of Dulcet's favourite resorts, and

I found him already sitting in one of the alcoves studying the menu. He was in fine spirits, and his quizzical blue eyes shone with a healthy lustre.

"Are you armed?" he said, mysteriously.

"What," I cried, "are we going to do some more guinea pigs to death? It was cruel. I have scruples against taking innocent lives. Besides, your experiment proved nothing. Those pigs would have died anyway, shut up in an air-tight box like that."

"Stuff!" he said. "The box was not hermetic. I had left small apertures: there was plenty of oxygen. No, it was not the confinement in the tin box that killed them. After you had gone, the chemist whom I had consulted called me up. My suspicions were sound. Have you ever heard of fumacetic acid?"

This is going to be terrible, I thought to myself, and ordered tenderloin steak, well done, with a double order of hashed brown potatoes.

"Have you ever heard of fumacetic acid?" he repeated, relentlessly.

"No," I said, nervously.

"It is a deadly and little-known drug," he said, "which (so the chemist tells me) possesses the property that when vaporised the slightest whiff of it causes instantaneous death if inhaled into the lungs. The tobacco in that tin had been doctored with it. I sent the chemist the pipe that poor Mistletoe was smoking when he died, and he analysed what was left in the bowl. There is no doubt whatever. He was poisoned in that way. I tell you, my professional duty as a literary agent requires that in my clients' interest I should sift this thing to the very bottom. It may explain some of those earlier deaths that baffled the Authors' League."

"But Mrs. Carboy, surely, did not smoke," I was about to say; but I checked myself in time.

"Dove," I said, "you are superb. But I wish you would tell me how you worked the thing out. What was it that first aroused your suspicions? If it had not been for you, I should never have guessed anything wrong."

"Of course," he said, grimly, "it was that murderous placard in the laundry window, and that is to your credit, for you noticed it. That was the one thing that made plain the whole complicated business. Naturally I suspected the tobacco from the first, for (as I told you) it was a mixture that Mistletoe never smoked ordinarily. But when I heard that that eccentric and damnable placard had been put there at the suggestion of the tobacconist next door, and then found that the tobacconist was also a bookseller, I knew the worst. I have spent to-day in rounding up the threads, and I think I may say without vainglory that the miscreant is in my power."

"But the man standing on one leg?" I said, puzzled. "What was he up to, and why did he run?"

Dulcet's face shone with quiet triumph.

"I told you," he said, "to look for a nervous man smoking Cartesian Mixture. That tobacconist, Basswood, smokes Cartesian. It is a very moist, sticky blend, as you know. It can only be shaken out of the pipe, after smoking, by vigorously knocking the bowl on something hard. Very well, and if there is no stone step or something of that sort handy, what will a smoker tap his pipe on? Why, he will stand on one leg and knock it out on the lifted heel of the other. And his running away when you addressed him so whimsically, wasn't that a pretty good sign of nervousness—and also of a guilty and doubtful spirit?"

He finished his tumbler of the near-beer that has made Milwaukee infamous, and leaned forward earnestly.

"You know very well," he said, "that that laundryman would never have thought of his grotesque notice, addressed to 'Artists and Authors,' if someone hadn't suggested it to him. Obviously he was only a gull. That card was intended as a decoy, to lure Mistletoe away from his room, so that Basswood could leave the poisoned tobacco for him. Basswood had studied Mistletoe's habits, and must have known that the notice about the collars would be sure to catch his eye. Now we had better be going. The police will be at Basswood's shop at eight o'clock."

I could have done with a little strong coffee, but he haled me out of the restaurant, and we walked up Amsterdam Avenue. How little, I reflected, did the passers by, hurrying about their kindly and innocent concerns, suspect our dark and perilous errand.

"The motive, of course," said Dulcet, "was to profit by the increase of value Mistletoe's death would give to his literary work. You will see a proof of that in a

moment. Here we are. Come on, this is no time to hang back!"

He strode into the brightly lighted shop, and I followed with a clumsy assumption of carelessness. I must confess that my eye wandered in search of suitable cover in case there should be any gun play.

Mr. Basswood was behind the counter, smoking a battered-looking briar. One side of the bowl was worn down nearly half an inch (from repeated knocking out on stone steps, I suppose). He was a fat, cross-looking person, with a black jut of moustache and a small, vindictive eye.

"A friend told me about your bookshop," said Dulcet. "He said that you sometimes buy books and manuscripts and that sort of thing."

"Yes, sometimes," said Basswood, without enthusiasm.

"I have an unpublished story of John Mistletoe's," said Dulcet. "It is about forty pages of manuscript. What would you give for that?"

The dealer's eyes brightened. He took his pipe from his mouth, and knocked it out smartly on his heel, tramping on the glowing cinders. Dulcet looked at me gravely.

"Let me see it," Basswood said, eagerly.

"I haven't got it with me. But give me an idea what it would be worth to you."

"If it is genuine, and characteristic of Mistletoe's genius," said Basswood, slowly, "I would give you two hundred dollars for it."

"Nonsense!" said Dulcet. "It isn't worth half that. I would not dream of selling it for more than seventy-five."

Basswood looked startled.

"I guess you are not in touch with the market for such things," he said. "There is more interest among collectors in Mistletoe's work than in any other recent writer. Perhaps you don't realise what a difference his sad death has made in the prices of his editions. It is very regrettable, but the death of a writer of that kind always puts a premium on collectors' items, because there will never be any more of them."

"Oh, I see," said Dulcet, politely. "It is his death that has made the difference, is it?"

"Exactly."

"Well, then, I suppose this manuscript *is* worth more than I thought. By the way, I think the title of it will interest you. It is called 'The Mystery of the Soft Collars' and deals with a murder that took place on Eighty-second Street."

I couldn't help admiring the glorious nonchalance with which Dulcet made this remark, gazing the dealer straight in the eye. Basswood's face was a study, and his cheek was pale and greasy. But he, too, was a man of considerable nerve.

"I don't believe it's genuine," he said. "That doesn't sound to me like Mistletoe's style." His voice shook a little, and he added: "However, if it's as interesting as it sounds, I might pay even more than two hundred for it."

"You rascal!" shouted Dulcet. "Do you think you can buy me off? No, keep your hands above the counter!"

He had whipped out his revolver, and held it at the man's face.

"Look here, Mr. Basswood," he said. "Even the cleverest of us make mistakes. Let me call your attention to one thing. If it was Mistletoe's death that made the difference in the values of his books, how is it that this bill from your printer, for that new catalogue of yours, is dated ten days before Mistletoe died? I picked it up in your back room the other day. Doesn't that seem to show that you knew, ten days before the event, that there was going to be a sudden boom in Mistletonia? Ten days before he died you were multiplying the prices of the items you had gathered. Now, you dog, can you explain that?"

Basswood shook, but still he clung to his hope.

"I'll give you a thousand for that manuscript," he said.

"Ben," said Dulcet to me, "just slip around the corner and whistle three times. The police are waiting on Eighty-fifth Street."

¶

"THERE'S still one thing that puzzles me," I said to Dulcet late that night as we sat in his room for a final smoke. "I remember that before we discovered that sign in the laundry you said that what we needed to do was to find a rhyme between tobacco and collar buttons. Now what the deuce started you off on collar buttons?"

He smiled patiently.

"When I had to pack up poor old Mistletoe's belongings," he said, "I had the sad task of going through his bureau drawers. You know the devilish little buttons that the manufacturers insist on

putting on soft collars. They always come off after one or two washings, and then the collar collapses round your neck into an object of slovenly reproach. Mistletoe was a bachelor, and there was no one to do any mending for him. And when I found that every one of his soft collars had its little button neatly sewed on, I knew there was something wrong. I ask you, wouldn't that have aroused the alarm of the least suspicious?"

¶

UP to the present time, as far as I know, Basswood remains the only bookseller who has ever been electrocuted.

(New Series commences next month: The World's Greatest Love Stories.)

Points for the Epicure

RARITY enhances pleasure. JUVENAL.

A PERSON'S taste is as much his own peculiar concern as his opinion or his purse. J. S. MILL.

GIVE me barley meal and water and I will rival Jove in happiness. EPICURUS.

TAKE away the idea of perfection, and you take away enthusiasm. ROUSSEAU.

PERFECT taste is the faculty of receiving the greatest possible pleasure from those material sources which are attractive to our moral nature in its purity and perfection. RUSKIN.

THE learned understand the theory of art, the unlearned its pleasure. QUINTILIAN.

THE two essentials of a feast are only fun and feed. O. HOLMES.

AFTER a good dinner one can forgive everybody, even one's own relations. O. WILDE.

THANK God for tea! What would the world do without tea! How did it exist? I am glad I was not born before tea. SIDNEY SMITH.

"I RATHER like bad wine," said Mr. Mountchesney; "one gets so bored with good wine." DISRAELI.

THERE is a physiognomical character in the tastes for food. C—— holds that a man cannot have a pure mind who refuses apple dumplings. I am not certain but he is right. LAMB.

BEAUTY is the elimination of superfluities. MICHAEL ANGELO.

THE number of pure artists is small. Few souls are so finely tempered as to preserve the delicacy of meditative feeling untainted by the allurements of accidental suggestion. Dr. JOHN BROWN.

A MAN who can do everything can do nothing. PROV.

At 2-42 A.M.

Drama and heroism in mid-air

By JAMES WARNER BELLAH

THE little pink paper smiled cheerfuliy against the mouse-grey blanket that covered the squadron-office table. Clean and crisp as a child's dress, it was. It had come from wing headquarters an hour and forty minutes ago and it stated quite simply that Number —— Squadron R.A.F. would bomb Mannheim quite thoroughly some time before the following dawn.

Mr. McKenzie, being at once clever and junior flying officer of the squadron, had done the rest. He closed his book of logarithms and put his parallel ruler back into its leather case. He rolled up his map—a map with red lines drawn between Dunkirk and Mannheim. He squinted again at the calculations wherein he had stirred and boiled wind deflection with engine speeds. Upon a separate piece of paper he skimmed off the result: "Compass bearings, S E b S—zero at 2-42 a.m." He clipped his work to the grinning pink paper and knocked out his pipe. There came a sharp tap at the door.

"Come in." The door snapped back briskly and Mr. McKenzie's gunnery sergeant saluted upon the threshold.

"That man 'Olloway, sir," said the sergeant, "'as reported sick, sir—agyne, sir."

"What is it this time?"

"'E's trying to swank it for flu. But it's my personal hopinion 'e's got wind-up, sir. 'E's orl right, 'e is, until a blinkin' raid is signaled, then 'e ups and reports 'isself to the M.O. With your leave, sir, I'd loike to see 'im washed out flying duty altogether and a permanent replycement myde in the crew."

"Who've you in mind?"

"Well, sir, there's 'Oskins—'e's young, but 'e's steady. I've had 'im on the bomb toggles wiv me the last four raids. 'E's a qualified gunner, sir. I think we could shift 'im to the gun in the for'ard cockpit—e's good eyes, sir, and steady-loike. And I could tyke Old Smith along uv me on the toggles. Smith's quiet and 'e's a good 'and, 'e is. And 'e's keen to fly, sir—pukka keen."

"Righto," said Mr. McKenzie. "Make the shift. Keep your eye on Smith to-night, and if he's satisfactory we'll make it permanent. And tell Hoskins not to get excited and shoot off our own propellers."

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir. 'E knows 'is arc of fire, sir."

"Right."

It was cold and miserable in the cavernous sheet-iron hangar. The huge doors were closed so that no glow smudge from the working lights inside might show to mark the airdrome to enemy planes. But the cold was a thing born of the hangar itself, to be kept out by no doors. Men's breath hung white in the petrol-tainted air and their fingers, blue under the grease, fumbled awkwardly at their work. Now and again a man rose and thrashed his arms violently for a second to force the blood back into his hands. A spanner dropped to the cement flooring with a sharp cold clack. A hammer rose and fell six times in spaced, clanking blows that echoed presently in six drum rumbles against the iron roof.

Old Smith set his water pails down upon the floor and straightened the crick in his back. A red welt was burned across his numb fingers where the galvanized handles had cut into the flesh. He flexed his hands and blew upon them fiercely. For a moment he stood there staring upward into the dimly lit tracery of wire and strut above him.

Twelve feet over his head, a four-bladed propeller grinned ghoulishly as the light glinted upon the boltheads of its boss. Complacent monster, biding its time, waiting quietly while the frozen pygmies around its colossal wheels pumped a petrol soul into it, pounded its metallic body into trim.

Men swarmed over it in the darkness; pocket flashes glowed and winked inside the steel-grey fabric of its body. Back of the undercarriage, the loading crew grunted

and puffed as they shifted bombs from the hand truck to the carrying frames and shoved them home in the racks. Farther off in the gloom of the shadowy hangar men worked at the tips of the folded wings, tinkering with the emergency landing flares on the underside of the lower planes—tin reflector cones that held magnesium strips. In the tiny snout, far in front of the grinning propellers, a head showed for a moment and stared downward at the hangar floor eighteen feet below. Then the head disappeared and the slim, chaste needle of a machine-gun barrel rose at a high angle from the cockpit in the snout and revolved slowly on the mounting yoke.

Old Smith's eyes travelled to the five other machines in the hangar. Five huge moths, with wings still folded in their cocoons, waiting to go out and lay their eggs—waiting for the darkest hours of the darkest nights. Twice a week they went—sometimes three times, on the nights when the moon set early. Hours it took to get them ready in the darkened hangars; hours of nervous, meticulous toil. Then suddenly they were gone in the night sky, their engines howling down the silences until the last echo galloped away across the flatlands. For a moment more the crowds on the tarmac would watch until the red, green and white dots of the navigating lights disappeared in the darkness above. Then they would turn, sleep-stupid, and stumble to their huts to wait until the morning phone call told them that somewhere out on the sandy wastes of the Channel beaches the machines were back again, waiting patiently for the bomb holes on the airdrome to be filled up for their return, for lorries to bring them petrol and oil.

Night after night Old Smith had seen it and of all the decrepit, superannuated flotsam in the R.A.F.—Class C fellows with third-class air-mechanic ratings, odd-job, pail-carrying men from the four corners of nowhere—it had affected him most. Boys they let do it; why shouldn't he? Not so old—forty on the books, he was. A bald lie, perhaps, but with his moustache off and his hair taken care of at one pound sixpence a bottle and his heart still good—why not? He shrugged. Months before, when no recruiting officer would take him and he wouldn't take the only job they said he was good for, he had come to the R. A. F. with joy in his heart. It had been enough to be allowed to do anything then. Now it was different. By gad, sir, Captain Metcalf, the pilot of this very machine, was a bare twenty-two, and young McKenzie, the relief pilot, was just nineteen—mere children to do the job, while a man like himself—a man who knew a thing or two——

He shrugged and half stooped for his pails.

To the right of the grinning propeller above his head a pair of feet protruded from a hole in the throat of the machine. They groped a moment for the rungs of the ladder that reached to the hangar floor. The little white sign that hung from the lower plane—the white sign with its black, warning letters, Keep Clear of Propellers—trembled slightly with the movement of the groping feet. Smith pulled hurriedly at the sides of his balaclava, patted its woollen surface against his ears and stooped again for his pails.

The feet were halfway down the ladder when he stood up. The head that belonged to the feet turned sharply and in the light from the working lamps on the floor the eye-balls glinted.

"That you, Smith?"

"Yes."

The gunnery sergeant climbed down the remaining rungs and stood on the cement floor. "'Ow'd you like to fly to-night?"

"Sir?" Smith's heart jumped a beat and the cords twitched suddenly behind his knees.

"Yes. 'Olloway's sick. I've spoke to Mr. McKenzie. I'll tyke you on the bomb toggles wiv me. 'Op it now! Drop them pyles. Draw yerself a suit an' 'elmet out of stores and if you've a sweater, tuck it on underneath. You'll need gloves, too. I'll give you a chit for the storekeeper. You'll want a snack of tea about 'arf-past eleven. Report to me here in flight office wiv the rest of the crew. An' leave yer putties off. 'Twon't show under the suit. Stops circulation. 'Op it now!" The sergeant turned on his heel and walked off into the shadows. His voice rang sharply above the muffled noises. "Ho, Gowan! Replycement on Forty ——. Smith's for flying to-night!"

Somehow Smith managed to stumble out into the open air. He stood for a moment just beyond the light-lock door with his eyes so tightly shut that the wrinkled flesh around them twitched with the tension.

He had stood that way once before in his life. More than three years ago, it was. He had sneaked off from Town and gone down into Kent to stand alone upon the cliff tops, a solitary, pathetic old figure in tweeds, listening and straining for the sounds that came from Flanders—came rolling and thumping across the grey Channel waters like muffled drums. English guns. Somewhere out there in France. English guns hammered angrily in the mist. Poor English guns—small-calibred and pitifully short of ammunition, yapping insolently like terrier dogs into the throats of forty-two-centimeter mastiffs. Yapping with deadly precision until the day's allotment of shells was gone, then hooking in bravely and galloping backward—ever backward to the Marne. He had stood upon the cliff tops in the gathering dusk with his eyes tightly closed and his fists clenched. That time, when he had opened his eyes, tears clouded their pale blue—two tears that trickled gently to his chin and splotched the glazed white points of his collar. Presently he had shrugged, half in anger, half in self-pity, and gone home for two years to sulk.

¶

NOW, at the hangar door, there were no tears. When he opened his eyes they glinted sharply and he pounded his fists against each other until the knuckles screamed in pain. Flying! By gad, sir, flying!

He set off briskly towards the dark hutments across the airdrome, his feet pounding harshly against the iron surface of the ground. As he walked, the blood flowed again in his cramped legs. He straightened his shoulders under his rough tunic and drew in his old stomach until the top of his breeches hung slack against it. If a man could keep his stomach in and his legs strong—he chuckled softly in the darkness—at one pound sixpence a bottle his hair would take care of itself. Clever thought, that. Anyone else would have chosen a staring, spurious black. Not so Smith—blond—soft blond, even at the roots. Fight left in the old dog yet. He pushed open the door to the hutments. Old Smith they called him. How old? Humph!

The room was foul with the stale smell of work dungarees and the acrid tang of cigarettes. By gad, anyone could wangle himself into the R.A.F. as a third-class air mechanic in these days, but few of them ever went across the lines on a raid! He pulled on his sweater and unrolled his putties. Sound of guns! Humph! To-night it was fight! Old Smith—fiddlesticks!

Outside again, he lunged briskly through the darkness to stores. He laid his chit upon the counter with a thump of his fist and received in exchange one brand new *suit aviation*, a helmet and a pair of leather gloves. He stuffed the gloves and helmet into his tunic pocket, threw the huge teddy-bear bulk of the suit across his shoulder and set off for the men's mess.

Across the airdrome he could hear the dull rumble of the hangar doors as they were rolled back. Soon now. He broke into an awkward trot. . . . Flying!

It was after eleven o'clock by his wrist watch. He poked his legs into the board-like trousers of his suit and gulped his tea. He buttoned the ankle straps and thrust his arms through the stiff sleeves. Around him the gunners and toggle men of the squadron were slumped on the benches, eating in sleepy silence. He buttoned up the front of the suit and drank the last of his tea.

"Dinna hurry, Smith. Monnheim'll be waitin' fur us t' cum. They're verra backward i' movin' therre cities aboot." Laughter cracked in a sharp snort against the low rafters of the mess roof.

Smith looked at the man as if he had never seen him before. He finished the last of his tea and went out into the open air. Across the airdrome he could hear the creak of tail-skid trucks as the mechanics trundled out the machines. He quickened his pace, until presently he could see the nearest plane. The ground crew swarmed in the darkness beside her, pulling the wings around into place, stretching the forward guy wires into turnbuckles and ramming home the wing pins, while men underneath inserted the cotters and hammered them back. Somewhere above, a crank butt tinkled against the starboard engine and a voice from the darkness called "All clear?" Far down the line of planes an exhaust coughed loudly once and was silent.

Smith threw back his head and drank in the night air. His blood raced wildly within him and his lips were parted in a grin.

He stumped into the hangar and knocked at the door of the flight office. There was a slight swagger to his gait, an upward thrust to his chin.

Hoskins was there and the two machine gunners of the after-cockpit. Presently the gunnery sergeant himself pushed open the door.

" Now then, men, draw yer ammunition drums—they're on the hand truck outside—an' stow 'em aboard. No cigarettes to-night, you after-cockpit men. I saw yer last time. Mind ! You, Smith, turn out yer pockets ! No letters ! Got a wristlet disc ? If yer 'ave, tyke it off. Want no identification of any kind on yer. Just yer nyme and rank. That's enough in cyse yer tyken pris'ner. 'Op it now, you gunners ! Get yer drums and climb aboard. Come along, Smith." He led the way out into the empty hangar again and across to the yawning mouth of the open doors. There he stopped while the gunners loaded their bags with double-decker aerial drums of Lewis-gun ammunition.

Out on the line of planes an engine roared into vibrant life, sputtered for a moment and sank to a pulsating drone. Another roared and another, until presently the darkness trembled before one's eyes and light flashes from the exhaust pipes winked like tiny yellow pennants, frayed at the ends. Old Smith turned his back to the dust clouds and buckled the straps of his helmet. His throat was dry and sandy, and his heart trembled within him. Worth while, this !

The gunnery sergeant touched his wrist and pointed upward. He reached out and started up the ladder that led into the dark throat of the plane. Out of the corner of his eye he could see Mr. McKenzie, with his uniform cap cocked on the side of his head and his pipe sticking out of the corner of his mouth. He was passing out slips of paper to the other pilots—compass bearings and the zero. He climbed on up and poked his head into the trap. Someone's feet were on a level with his eyes—Hoskins' feet. He tapped them and Hoskins moved to let him get in. The cubby glimmered with the dull light from the instrument board in the open cockpit above. Captain Metcalf was sitting at the wheel, feeling tentatively for the rudder bar with his feet, as if he were an organist about to commence an overture. Smith pulled up through the trap and crawled to one side. The soles of Hoskins' feet disappeared in the gloom as he crawled forward through the tiny door that led into the forward gun turret.

The sergeant's head came through the trap in the flooring. He waved a hand to Smith to move backward into the bomb chamber next to the petrol tanks. The noise from the simmering engines blasted all thought of speech. Smith crouched on the thin boards of the runway and waited. Mr. McKenzie's head came up through the trap into the dim light. His pipe was gone from his mouth and he had his helmet on. He crawled upward into the control cockpit beside Captain Metcalf.

The gunnery sergeant leaned forward on his hands and knees and snapped the hatch into place. There was a moment's pause.

Smith wished he could see something. He felt along the trembling side fabric until his fingers touched a strut. No seam. No eyelet. Nothing. Rat in a hole. Stupid. He moved his feet impatiently. If he could only stand up in the control cockpit beside the pilot !

The sergeant crawled aft along the runway planking. His hand touched Smith's shoulder and pushed him down on his haunches. Then he held up the radium face of his wrist watch and pointed to the time. His finger nail travelled down the dial to two o'clock and on to forty-two minutes after. His face came close to Smith's ear and he screamed against the engine roar, " Myke 'self com'table ! "

Smith nodded and they sat down together to wait. Inane, this. Crouched in the darkness, in a tiny hole, with the bomb racks on the right, the first petrol tanks behind and a wall of fabric rippling stiffly in the back-draught of the engines on the left. In front, over the gunnery sergeant's head, Captain Metcalf's feet showed in the faint glow. McKenzie had taken his place at the controls. Maddening not to be able to see. Smith fumed silently and strained his eyes forward. The gunnery sergeant settled down on the runway planking and hugged his knees. Nothing to do but wait. Absurd.

Above, in the control cockpit, Captain Metcalf stared into the darkness ahead. A pocket flash winked on the ground below, Mr. McKenzie's feet stiffened on the rudder bar. He took one hand from the wheel and slowly pushed the throttles forward. The engines whined quickly on

a rising note until they reached their full pitch—a tremendous screaming monotone that thrust once fiercely into ear drums and stayed with such insistence that presently it was as if there was no sound. Forty —— shivered for a moment and settled into a continuous rippling tremor of wire and strut and fabric.

The boards of the runway chattered and trembled against Smith's heels. His ears itched under his helmet. The engines were warm now. They whined slowly down to their old note and sighed gently at six hundred revolutions a minute.

The light on the ground winked again for the chocks to be pulled out from in front of the huge wheels of the landing gear. Again Mr. McKenzie's hand touched the throttle. This time Forty —— lurched forward stubbornly and settled into an ambling waddle out towards the centre of the airdrome. The wheels bumped on the uneven ground and the cockpit rocked in short pushes and thrusts. Presently the big bomber stopped again to wait for the rest of the formation. Through the darkness Captain Metcalf watched the flame tatters from the exhausts of the other ships as they wobbled into line. His hand rested on Mr. McKenzie's shoulder. A long sabre of light leaped out from the blackness behind and lashed across the airdrome in a broad white pathway. Metcalf's fingers bit into McKenzie's shoulder. The throttle came forward in a swift movement, full on.

Forty —— jumped in amazement, tottered for a second and then started on a slow trot along the light path—a trot that increased to a run—a run that became a gallop. Like a fat old lady, she was—an old lady with her skirts gathered up—scampering away in fright.

Young McKenzie's hands tightened on the huge wheel. Metcalf bent suddenly and snapped on the navigating lights—a little white light at the tail, and red and green dots on the wing tips. Then slowly the control wheel came backward under McKenzie's hands. The undercarriage bumped, bumped, the cockpit lurched gently and the sabre of light was gone. Darkness—yawning, cavernous darkness, broken only by the faint shaded glow of the instruments. It was as if a closet door had been slammed in their faces. Rushing headlong, they were, at a hundred and some odd miles an hour, into black nothingness.

Mr. McKenzie sat stiffly at the wheel, with the muscles of his jaw drawn into tight cords, staring straight ahead. Metcalf, with his chin on the cowling, stared backward to catch the faint silhouette of the other machines as they rose against the lighter darkness of the night sky. He pulled his dead pipe from his pocket and stuck it between his teeth. Down the long, smooth fabric surface of the fuselage he could see a dark blotch—the head and shoulders of one of the after-cockpit gunners. He turned around again and read the story of the instrument board—air speed, registered by the Pitot tubes. Right! Engine revolutions. Right! Altitude, twelve hundred. Cross bubble. Centre of tube. Longitudinal bubble. Slightly forward. Right for climbing. Then he squatted calmly on the step, leaned his head against the edge of the seat, yawned and closed his eyes as if he had just finished a boring book in his hut and was about to catch forty winks.

Seven men, streaking through space with a cargo of bombs weighing hundreds of pounds. Seven men about to blast daylight into the factories of Mannheim. Seven men unable to do a thing but read the story of the instrument board. Fighting by dictation. Cavalry charging in a treadmill. So many minutes on the synchronized chronometer, such-and-such a compass bearing at such-and-such a speed. A wave of the hand, a pull on the bomb toggles and home. From take-off to landing—nothing to see but the instruments or perhaps a river glint in the darkness below.

Old Smith had known when they left the ground. The runway from slanting upward to the door of the forward gunnery turret had come slowly down to level. That was all—that and the fact that the wheels no longer bumped and the lurching of the cockpit was longer and fuller and less frequent.

He crouched in stubborn silence, disappointment gnawing at his heart. Fighting? Humph! It was all worked out beforehand. Six little glass dials did the whole thing. Stupid.

His legs were cramped and his neck ached from the infernal throbbing of the engines. After an eternity the gunnery sergeant stirred and crawled forward on hands and knees. Captain Metcalf crouched beside him and Smith knew by their cupped hands that they were shouting into each

other's ears. Not a word reached him and they were only four feet away. Presently the sergeant came back and Captain Metcalf's feet disappeared in the open cockpit above. Other feet took their place—Mr. McKenzie's. They were like children playing hide and seek in an attic—moving about slowly, awkwardly, noiselessly, lest they be caught.

Hours ago, it must have been, since they left the ground—hours. Old Smith was frantic from cramp. He stretched out his legs and rubbed them. He flexed his arms. He cursed luridly and settled back again ag inst the strut that seared into his back.

¶

WHEN he opened his eyes the sergeant was gone and a sharp scythe of wind cut at his lungs. He stared and shivered with the biting cold. The sergeant's body was half in and half out of the door to the forward cockpit. Slowly he crawled backward and shut the door. Smith pulled off his glove and looked at his watch. Thirty-four minutes after two. He rose to his haunches.

The sergeant stopped at the control cockpit. He and Mr. McKenzie had a map on their knees. Presently Mr. McKenzie nodded gravely and his head and shoulders disappeared above. There was a moment's pause, then the engines cut suddenly and the silence howled in Smith's ears—howled so loudly that it was several seconds before he heard the wild scream of wind in the flying wires as the nose dipped forward into the dive. The sergeant crawled up the sloping planking to him and yelled into his ear: "We're on! 'Arf a mo' now! Let go the after toggles when I slap you!"

The wire scream rose to a wild shriek and suddenly two quick "Pomps!" sounded far above and to the right. The sergeant grinned. "Archie!" he yelled.

Mr. McKenzie's face appeared again in the passage. He was staring upward into the control cockpit. He raised his hands on a level with his chin, palms downward and fingers pointed aft to the two crouching figures in the toggle chamber. The wire scream rose to a vicious shriek and died suddenly in a long banshee wail. The runway planking became almost level again, and the motors coughed and whined into life. Smith's hands were on the toggles, touching gingerly, trembling with the cold.

Suddenly Mr. McKenzie's jaw clamped shut and his hands snapped down to the level of his knees. The gunnery sergeant's hand shot out and slapped Smith's shoulders. Four times Smith's wrists jerked and the toggles hesitated and pulled free under his fingers. Four times the runway rebounded gently against the soles of his feet. Now the sergeant himself was yanking the forward toggles—quickly, methodically, like a sacristan playing upon a carillon. One-two. One. One-two. Then in a flash the runway planking soared upward and to the right in a sickening sweep. Old Smith lost his footing for a brief second and crashed backward against the side struts. He groped for a handhold and clung to it. Far below, a choked crash thumped sullenly in the night air and another, like the stamping of stallions on rotten stable boards. Then the engines opened again into their full-throated drowning roar and the crashing died abruptly.

From somewhere light came—blinding white light that flooded the cubby and the cockpit from below. The runway planking swept up to the left and slanted again at a wild angle, but the searchlight followed and stayed with it. Old Smith could see the gunnery sergeant clutching the next strut. The lines of his face were stark in an agony of suspense. Suddenly, on all sides, above and below, there came again that plomp-plomping of Archie shells, stabbed with the quick, cold chatter of Hoskins' machine gun. The runway planking shuddered under their feet and swept through a quick arc into darkness.

Captain Metcalf had side-slipped out of the light or Hoskins had pinked it.

Presently Metcalf's feet came into view, then his head. He took his dead pipe from his teeth and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. McKenzie had taken his place for the run home. The sergeant watched Metcalf for a moment and then nodded in satisfaction to Smith.

"Orl right!" he screamed through his cupped hands. "Sleep now, if you've a mind to. On our wye 'ome!"

Smith stared at him in amazement and his mouth dropped open, but the sergeant was already bedding himself down on the planking. By gad, sir, it wasn't right! Nothing had happened, and yet here it was all over and the bombs gone! He couldn't understand it. He crouched sullenly in his corner. Here they were over Germany and nothing to show for it but a half-dozen

bursts from the machine gun and the empty bomb racks. And the sergeant was asleep already at his feet! By gad, sir, if he were Captain Metcalf he'd show them a thing or two! He'd go down, he would, and let 'em have it from all the guns; strafe them properly. This was no war—this was a pantomime to music. A few bombs, a few shots and home. And all done by little grinning instrument dials! He sat there in the darkness, fuming and staring at the sleeping sergeant, while Forty —— sang on into the night. He was cheated, hoaxed, sold. There was nothing to it.

The cold crept into his bones presently—a thin toxic cold that lulled him into drowsiness. He stretched out his legs and leaned back against the strut. For a moment more he tried to nurse his indignation, but it was no go. His eyes closed and he slept. . . .

The engines had been cut some time before. He woke with a start and his ears strained against the echoing silence. Outside the wall of fabric the wires howled in a thin, piercing shriek. The sergeant still slept on the runway, with his head pillowed in his arm. The motors popped for a moment and died down with a long whistling sigh that melted again into wire scream. There was a slight bump and another, a crunch of the shock absorbers recoiling in their cylinders on the undercarriage below. The runway lurched drunkenly and the sergeant jumped to his feet. The lurching became a slow wobble. The wobble became a short, snapping bounce. The bounce ended in a shiver. And Forty —— stood still, pulsating gently to the slow ticking over of its propellers.

They were opening the trap under the control cockpit. Smith crawled forward behind the sergeant. There was sand below, dimly visible in the first grey light of morning. The engines sputtered and died completely.

The crew dropped through the trap one by one to stretch and yawn upon the beach. Far down the sands velvet combers crawled slowly shoreward, thrusting their lace fringes ahead of them up the beach. Captain Metcalf yawned.

"Send someone to telephone to the 'drome, sergeant," he said. "We're west of Dunkirk somewhere. Hello!" He pointed upward. "Here come two more of our crowd."

They watched until the two other planes whistled in to their landings down the beach.

"You, 'Oskins," snapped the sergeant, "trot along up the dunes and wyte a few moments until we see 'ow many land. Go inland until yer find a town, then signal through to the 'drome and report us in to the O.C. Mind you, give 'em the nyme of the town you call from. Spell hit—don't try to pronounce hit! Tell 'im we're on the beach wyting orders fer to proceed to the airdrome as soon as the shell holes from larst night is filled in, if any. Sharply, now!"

"All right, you men," said Metcalf. "Turn in for your beauty sleep."

They dropped down upon the sand under the huge wings and slept where they lay.

Old Smith was the last to sleep. He snorted once under his breath. "Air raid—humph! Seaside picnic rather." Once more his tired eyes fluttered open. Above his head, on the grey snout of Forty —— there were white letters—the name of the ship—and the name was Kewpie. Then he turned his back indignantly and slept.

Four times Smith went over the lines on night raids and crouched in the gloom of the toggle chamber. Four times he fumed inwardly at the blind, unhurried method of the business; at the apparent lack of completeness, at the absurd ease with which the stupid show was done. He was part of the regular crew now and drawing flying pay accordingly. The sergeant seemed to think that was incentive enough, but Smith had another reason for sticking. It was the lesser of two evils to him. Between pail-carrying and flying there was a slight rub in favour of the latter. They were both disgustingly tame and smelled of slackerism to him, but flying didn't give one so great a crick in the back.

¶

IT was towards the end of the month when he went out on his last raid in Kewpie. He had learned a few tricks of the trade. He knew that after the toggles were pulled, the runway lurched through a wide arc and sloped sharply upward, because the pilot was climbing and banking to spoil the range of the anti-aircraft batteries on the ground. He knew why the engines slowed just before the bomb signal. It threw the batteries and searchlights off the scent and gave Metcalf and young McKenzie a moment to squint

overside for a glimpse of the translucent black ribbon of the Rhine—to catch the blacker smudge of Mannheim in their bomb sights.

That night of the last raid the wind had changed direction and thrown them off the course. From his gloomy cubby, Smith watched the sergeant and Mr. McKenzie as they pored over their map in the glow of the luminous instruments. Presently they laid the map out upon the runway planking and went at it with a small pocket flash. Several times young McKenzie scribbled on the border in pencil, drew a cross line and added the result. The sergeant's lips were seamed together and his head shook slowly each time. Then McKenzie climbed up into the control cockpit and Metcalf came down to figure and shake his head. Smith's eyes closed and he crouched on his haunches, alert but utterly bored.

Suddenly his eyes blinked open, blinded by a sudden drenching bath of white light from below. He started to his feet just as Hoskins' machine gun began to laugh coldly up forward—horrid, idiotic laughter. The sergeant and Metcalf were on their knees over the map, staring open-mouthed. The runway lurched sharply just as the shrapnel chorus opened on all sides with its infernal plomp-plomping.

Smith clutched wildly at his strut and lay almost flat out against the side of the passage with the force of the wild banking. But the light stayed and the plomping thumped all around them. Suddenly the strut jumped under Smith's hand—jumped as if it had been hammered sharply with a sledge. The sergeant tripped and fell to his knees, like a doll with its sawdust half run out. Captain Metcalf's feet stumbled and fumbled awkwardly on the steps to the cockpit; they turned, they stepped back. His knees came into view. They doubled and his legs gave way as he plunged back heavily across the sergeant's body.

For a moment Smith thought that they had been thrown by the force of the sudden climbing turn. The runway was almost at right angles. Then, quickly, Smith started forward, for the two men didn't move, but lay huddled grotesquely against the fabric, and the runway was torn and splintered around their feet. He poked his head up into the control cockpit. Mr. McKenzie, with his mouth drawn into a blue line, was jerking and twisting the big wheel in front of him, trying frantically to side-slip out of the searchlight.

Smith hesitated. Searchlights—town—town—Mannheim. He ricocheted back into the plunging bomb chamber and pulled madly on the toggles. The engines coughed and snorted and the runway bounded against his feet as the bombs fell free. For a moment the light disappeared and Kewpie came level again. He jerked the last three toggles and bolted forward. He stood on the steps beside McKenzie, waiting. The cockpit bucked and jerked wildly in short lurches and suddenly the light came again, flooding everything. McKenzie's arm shot out, pointing ahead just as the plomping shrapnel began again. Smith stared. Silhouetted against the light, he saw Hoskins in the forward gun turret with his head and arms dangling over the rim.

He ducked down into the passage and crawled forward to the door. He yanked it open and grabbed Hoskins' ankle, pulling it towards him into the passage. He crawled into the cockpit and reached for the gun. There—below—right in the centre of the blazing white cone of light! His eyes travelled the sights and he pressed the trigger. The spade grip in his other hand pounded with the stuttering, jerking recoil, but he held it on, spraying steel-jacketed lead in a slow arc, firing by rule of thumb—point-blank, for he knew nothing of aerial gunnery. But the light went out. The tiny cockpit thrashed through the air as the huge plane turned. There were more lights behind, groping, searching, but never quite putting their fingers on Kewpie. Smith turned and twisted in the cockpit, watching and waiting, but the lights dropped behind them and presently they were only tiny crossed tracings far down on the border of the velvet curtain behind.

Slowly he crawled back to the control cockpit and dragged himself up beside the pilot. Young McKenzie turned his head and nodded. Below, in the runway, Smith could see Captain Metcalf's feet lolling loosely and moving with the vibration. He started once to crawl down to see if either the sergeant or Metcalf were alive. Hoskins, in the forward passage, was gone beyond a doubt. As he moved, McKenzie's hand touched his shoulder and pointed to the seat. He shook his head and his lips and eyes said "Stay here."

Smith stayed, slumped back against the cushioned seat, staring drowsily into the cold darkness that rushed toward them.

Hours he stayed, through the endless monotony while the limping engines coughed and sputtered their slow way to the Channel coast. Then presently Mr. McKenzie signalled for Smith to put his hands on the throbbing wheel. He was weakening, himself, and needed more strength on the controls. McKenzie's eyes shut and opened slowly in infinite fatigue and agony. The slow hands of the chronometer crept on towards dawn and the distant beaches . . .

The starboard engine was choking and gasping like an old man who will die before the dawn. Annoyance—petty, tired annoyance trembled across young McKenzie's face. The engine drew in its last breath and its soul passed. McKenzie cut both throttles and pushed the wheel forward into a slow glide. There was a faint bluish haze below and the altimeter gave them four thousand feet.

The wind sighed gently in the flying wires as they glided down. McKenzie tried to say something, but his voice was a helpless whisper. Smith stared over the side, wondering what the next move was to be. He was very tired and his right foot was numb with cold. Slowly he saw the faint bluish haze creep up to meet them. It must be the ground—it probably was the ground.

Slowly the altimeter needle sank towards sea level. McKenzie roused himself painfully and peered over the rim of the cockpit. Then suddenly his face was pinched with fright. His hand touched something beside him. Light flared in a cold white glow from both lower wing tips and rippled along strut and wire until the whole dark mass of Kewpie stood out in relief—there was ground below. So close it was that Smith could see a torn brick wall and a pygmy figure with arms raised.

Under McKenzie's hands the wheel started to move backward. Smith helped him pull on it. It stuck—and McKenzie crumpled suddenly and slid from the seat. Smith pulled with every stringy muscle in his old arms. There was a crash that snapped his head forward. Out of the corner of his eye he saw the starboard engine tear loose and hurl itself forward, trailing wire and broken struts after it. Kewpie's nose whipped around and melted quite away. Behind, everything tore loose and shuffled forward with the sound of a bass drum when the head has been kicked in.

Presently there was a whistling shriek and a thump and the patter of shrapnel. Again it came and again. The light was gone now—the wing-tip flares had burned out. After a moment the shrapnel stopped. A knife cut into Kewpie's rumpled fabric with a soft, dry sigh. A voice whispered harshly, "Anyone alive?"

A voice whispered back "Yes."

The first voice hesitated and the knife cut again at the fabric. A head appeared. Arms reached into the smashed cockpit, groping and feeling in the darkness. They touched a leg.

"By gad, sir, not that leg!"

"Easy, man—not so loud! You're way to hell and gone up the line and it's almost light. We'll have more shrapnel in a moment."

Slowly and carefully they pulled young McKenzie out and then they pulled Smith through the broken side. There was one man alive in the after-cockpit. On their shoulders they carried the three across the uneven ground and behind a slight ridge that was already greying in the morning light.

They were threading through the debris in the gully now—debris that smelled sickly sweet and mouldy. On they went up the other side. McKenzie groaned and then screamed sharply. A hand slapped across his mouth with a soft smack. For hours they seemed to go on and on. Then a shaded flicker of a candle stopped them.

Inside the C.C.S. it was hot and warm, and the air seared the lungs with a clean acid tang. There was a littered table and a row of tired, dirty faces sitting upon the benches along the damp wall.

"Night bomber crash, sir. This one's an officer."

The surgeon nodded and pinched out his cigarette. Hard-faced male nurses moved mechanically in the background.

Smith looked up wearily from the floor. Then suddenly his eyes blazed. "Stoop down here, my man!" he thundered. The private stiffened and bent down. Smith pointed a shaking finger at his collar badge. "You're D.K.L.L.I."

"Yes, sir. You crashed in the Kent's support trenches."

"Damn the crash!" snapped Smith. "Why didn't you say you were Duke of Kent's?"

"I, sir?" The surgeon rubbed his lips with a finger and beckoned for a nurse.

He knelt beside Smith and cut away his left sleeve. "Gently now," he said.

Smith stared at him with hot light in his tired eyes. "Young man," he said, "I was wounded before you were born."

"Sh-h-h!" said the surgeon. "You're badly cracked up. Don't let go now." He pulled the plunger of his needle.

"Cracked up? What's that got to do with being wounded? I'll have you know that this isn't the Kent's first war."

The needle pricked into Smith's arm and the plunger shot home.

"There was Afghanistan—years ago," said Smith. "And Magersfontein. This war? Humph! Damned mechanical contrivances with flippant boys to work them. Nonsense!" His voice trailed off for a moment and then came back strongly again. "When I was young we fought."

"Who are you?" asked the surgeon.

Fifteen minutes later the twenty-seven-year-old colonel of the D.K.L.L.I.—the colonel who had been a lieutenant at Fère Champenoise—was running towards the C.C.S. with his adjutant after him. He vaulted down the steps into the cellar and tipped his tin hat back on his head.

"Where is he?" he whispered.

The surgeon pointed to the stretcher in the corner. Quickly the colonel crossed and knelt down beside the still figure. He snapped his fingers softly and nodded. Smith opened his eyes. The colonel's voice was low. "You won't remember me, sir. Stickney—X Company. I saw you twice, sir. You were at Salisbury in 1912 when I joined. You had the brigade."

"Salisbury?" said Smith. "Brigade? Oh, yes, quite right. I was thinking of Delhi. X Company. I joined with X years ago. How is X —— Let me see— Connors was sergeant-major."

"Before my time, sir."

"And is Durham still commanding?"

"No, sir; the colonel was killed on the Somme. I have the Kent's now."

Smith's eyes fluttered wearily. "Impossible!" he said. "Colonel in six years?"

"It goes quickly these days."

"I'm afraid—too quickly for me. In India we used to wait ten years for a company—long ago. Less fighting in this war—can't understand it. Flippant boys running mechanical contrivances—outrageous! Silly thing was all smashed, I suppose."

"Oh, yes, quite," said the colonel. "A washout. Jolly fine thing you did after the pilot fainted. He swears you saved his life by pulling up the nose."

"Nonsense!" said Smith. "Thing was called Kewpie." He drew in his breath slowly. Several times it caught in his throat.

The colonel looked up quickly at the surgeon. The surgeon shrugged. Smith's eyelids fluttered.

"Whole war is stupid—too modern—bayonet and rifle my day—in Afghanistan things were different. Man could fight if he wanted to."

Again his breath caught and the last flush of colour left his lips.

"Kent's—good regiment—take care of it."

They buried him at sundown behind a little hill they had taken themselves the week before, and he lies among the D.K.L.L.I. You may see the stone near Cambrai.

The little village is rebuilt now and its white walls smile primly in the setting sun. The last rays bathe the Kent's own cemetery up on the hillside.

The stone says simply:

BRIG. GEN. SIR GEORGE PITT-BERESFORD,
C.M.G., RETIRED
KILLED ON ACTIVE SERVICE
WITH THE D.K.L.L.I.
NUMBER —— SQDN. R.A.F.

But at night, when the candles sputter on the mess table of the Duke of Kent's Loyal Light Infantry, they will tell you that the Kent's once had a colonel who died of old age on the field of battle. And the Kent's surgeon will swear that the only thing that might have contributed was a shrapnel scratch on one leg and a broken collar bone.

And on special guest nights there is a toast offered sometimes at the end of the evening. The Kent's have queer toasts which they have picked up from the four quarters of the globe, but this toast is the quaintest. It is always offered by the junior subaltern of X Company.

"Gentlemen," he says, "I give you—damned nonsense!"

And it is not taken in broken glass, for the Kent's are too old on the army lists to stamp such excellent sentiment with finality.

Just Nonsense

The March Hare's Apology

THE Hatter was the first to break the silence. "What day of the month is it?" he said, turning to Alice: he had taken his watch out of his pocket, and was looking at it uneasily, shaking it every now and then, and holding it to his ear.

Alice considered a little, and then said "The fourth."

"Two days wrong!" sighed the Hatter. "I told you butter wouldn't suit the works!" he added, looking angrily at the March Hare.

"It was the *best* butter," the March Hare meekly replied.

"Yes, but some crumbs must have got in as well," the Hatter grumbled; "You shouldn't have put it in with the bread-knife."

"The March Hare took the watch and looked at it gloomily; then he dipped it into his cup of tea, and looked at it again; but he could think of nothing better to say than his first remark, "It was the *best* butter, you know." Lewis Carroll.

GOOD people all, with one accord,
Lament for Madam Blaize,
Who never wanted a good word—
From those who spoke her praise.

She strove the neighbourhood to please,
With manners wondrous winning;
And never follow'd wicked ways,
Unless when she was sinning.

Her love was sought, I do aver,
By twenty beaux and more;
The King himself has follow'd her—
When she has walk'd before.

The needy seldom pass'd her door,
And always found her kind;
She freely lent to all the poor—
Who left a pledge behind.

At church, in silks and satins new,
With hoop of monstrous size;
She never slumbered in her pew—
But when she shut her eyes.

But now her wealth and finery fled,
Her hangers-on cut short all;
The doctors found, when she was dead—
Her last disorder mortal.

Let us lament, in sorrow sore,
For Kent-street well may say,
That, had she lived a twelvemonth more,—
She had not died to-day.

Oliver Goldsmith.

A Parable

A PROFESSOR of Ichthyology was delivering his lecture. The students were listening—well, pretty attentive as students go—not to mention students of Ichthyology.

"The carp, gentlemen, the carp——"

Then followed some sharp facts about the carp.

"Now the carp, gentlemen, as I was saying——"

At that moment a carp came swimming into the lecture-room. How the beast did it, considering how dry it was there, does not concern us. The poor students had suffered from drought for ever so long—and, after all, a carp is no better than a student.

"There he is himself!" they cried, with one voice.

So they left the professor in the lurch with his lecture on the carp, and went to look at the carp for themselves. Multatuli (Ideen).

A Very Romantic Story

"YOU have been in Spain, sir?" said Mr. Trony Tupman.

"Lived there—ages."

"Many conquests, sir?" enquired Mr. Tupman.

"Conquests? Thousands. Don Bolaso Fizzigig—Grandee—only daughter—Donna Christina—splendid creature—loved me to distraction—jealous father—high-souled daughter—handsome Englishman—Donna Christina in despair—prussic acid—stomach pump in my portmanteau—operation performed—old Bolaso in ecstasies—consent to our union—join hands and floods of tears—romantic story—very."

"Is the lady in England now, sir?" inquired Mr. Tupman, on whom the description of her charms had produced a powerful impression.

"Dead, sir—dead," said the stranger, applying to his right eye the brief remnant of a very old cambric handkerchief. "Never recovered the stomach pump—undermined constitution—fell a victim."

"And her father?" inquired the poetic Snodgrass.

"Remorse and misery," replied the stranger. "Sudden disappearance—talk of the whole city—search made everywhere—without success—public fountain in the great square suddenly ceased playing—weeks elapsed—still a stoppage—workmen employed to clean it—water drawn off—father-in-law discovered sticking head first in the main pipe, with a full confession in his right boot—took him out, and the fountain played away again, as well as ever." Charles Dickens.

Diversions in Brobdingnag

THE Queen had before contrived another project. She ordered the joiner to make a wooden trough of three hundred feet long, fifty broad, and eight deep; which being well pitched to prevent leaking, was placed on the floor along the wall, in an outer room of the palace. It had a cork near the bottom to let out the water when it began to grow stale, and two servants could easily fill it in half an hour. Here I often used to row for my own diversion, as well as that of the Queen and her ladies, who thought themselves well entertained with my skill and agility. Sometimes I would put up my sail, and then my business was only to steer, while the ladies gave me a gale with their fans; and when they were weary, some of the pages would blow my sail forward with their breath, while I showed my art by steering starboard or larboard as I pleased. When I had done, Glumdalclitch always carried my boat into her closet, and hung it on a nail to dry. Swift.

The Patent Bedstead

IT is a bedstead with all the beautiful vitality of a flower—it opens with the dawn. If, for instance, you set the hand against six o'clock in the morning, at six the clock at the bed's head solemnly strikes the demi-twelve on its sonorous bell. If you pay no attention to the monitor, or idly, dreamily endeavour to compass the coherent sequence of sounds, the invention, within the succeeding two minutes, drops its tail-board and lets down your feet upon the floor. While you are pleasantly defeating this attempt upon your privacy by drawing up your legs within the precincts of the blankets, the virtuous head-board and the rest of the bed suddenly rise up in protest; and the next moment, if you do not instantly abdicate, you are launched upon the floor by a blind elbow that connects with the crank of an eccentric, that is turned by a cord that is wound around a drum, that is moved by an endless screw, that revolves within the body of the machinery. So soon as you are turned out, of course, you waive the balance of the nap and proceed to dress.

Frederick Swartout Cozzens.

Professor Blenkinsop's Theory

SAID Professor Blenkinsop,
" Man is weakest at the top,
We shall find this wholly true
If, from the æsthetic view,
We the problem analyse ;
Which I cordially advise
That we do," said the Professor.
And the students answered, " Yes, sir."

" For example, human creatures
Expose nearly all their features
Right in front, and so the head,
Save when viewed at rest in bed,
Looks ill-balanced and grotesque,
The reverse of picturesque.

" I admit, the ears abide
Evenly on either side,
But the rest all find a place
On the overladen face ;
Thus the head does wholly lack
Features to adorn its back ! "

" If my nose could be transferred
(Though the fancy seems absurd)
To adorn the other side,
It would certainly provide
Equilibrium of feature ;
Though I'm far from being a creature
Of good looks," said the Professor.
And the students all said, " Yes, sir."

" It would be much more refined,
For to blow one's nose *behind*,
Such action, though essential quite,
Is not at all a pretty sight ;
But, performed behind one's back,
Colds their ugliness would lack.

" But alas ! till tardy Science
Finds a feasible appliance
Which my theory shall
Render safe and practical,
We must each one, I suppose,
Wear the serviceable nose
On its customary place
In the centre of the face,
As worn now," said the Professor.
And the students answered, " Yes, sir."

" Now my argument is done ;
Think it over ev'ry one,
Heed not those whose baleful bent is
To swear I'm not *compos mentis*.
Such a foul and horrid slander,
On your revered class commander,
Would each one of you aggrieve ;
For I'm sure you'd not believe
That I'm mad," said the Professor.
And the students shouted, " YES, SIR ! '

LANGFORD REED.

Dr. Johnson's Peccadillo

IT seems he had been frequently observed at the club to put into his pocket the Seville oranges, after he had squeezed the juice of them into the drink which he made for himself. Beauclerk and Garrick talked of it to me, and seemed to think that he had a strange unwillingness to be discovered. We could not divine what he did with them; and this was the bold question to be put. I saw on his table the spoils of the proceeding night, some fresh peels nicely scraped and cut into pieces. "O, Sir," said I, "I now partly see what you do with the squeezed oranges which you put into your pocket at the club." *Johnson:* "I have a great love for them." *Boswell:* "And pray, Sir, what do you do with them? You scrape them, it seems, very neatly, and what next?" *Johnson:* "Let them dry, Sir." *Boswell:* "And what next?" *Johnson:* "Nay, Sir, you shall know their fate no farther." *Boswell:* "Then the world must be left in the dark. It must be said (assuming a mock solemnity), he scraped them, and let them dry, but what he did with them next, he never could be prevailed upon to tell." *Johnson:* "Nay, Sir, you should say it more emphatically:—he could not be prevailed upon, even by his dearest friends, to tell." James Boswell.

WHENCE comes it that in Clara's face,
The lily only has its place?
Is it because the absent rose
Has gone to paint her husband's nose?

Anon.

Mrs. Malaprop on Learning

MRS. MALAPROP.—Observe me, Sir Anthony.—I would by no means wish a daughter of mine to be a progeny of learning; I don't think so much learning becomes a young woman; for instance, I would never let her meddle with Greek, or Hebrew, or Algebra, or Simony, or Fluxions, or Paradoxes, or such inflammatory branches of learning—nor would it be necessary for her to handle any of your mathematical, astronomical, diabolical instruments But, Sir Anthony, I would send her, at nine years old, to a boarding-school in order to learn a little ingenuity and artifice. Then, Sir, she should have supercilious knowledge in accounts; and as she grew up, I would have her instructed in geometry, that she might know something of contagious countries;—but above all, Sir Anthony, she should be a mistress of orthodoxy, that she might not mis-spell, and mis-pronounce words so shamefully as girls usually do; and likewise that she might reprehend the meaning of what she is saying. This, Sir Anthony, is what I would have a woman know;—and I don't think there's a superstitious article in it. R. B. Sheridan.

AND those who use fusees
All grow by slow degrees
Brainless as chimpanzees,
Meagre as lizards
Go mad and beat their wives
Plunge, after shocking lives,
Razors and carving knives
Into their gizards.

Calverley.

A Travelling Episode

Mystery and adventure on Russian shores

By MICHAIL YURIEVITCH LERMONTOF

Here is another brilliant Russian tale by an author who ranks among the highest in that country. Although partly of Scottish descent M. Lermontof was, if anything, more Russian than the Russians in his view of life, and he handles the novel situation in this story in an unmistakably slavonic manner. Renowned as a soldier, Lermontof was finally killed in a duel.

TAMAGNE is the nastiest little hole of all the seashore towns in Russia. I was all but starved to death there; and, as if that were not enough, they tried to drown me. I arrived there in my light open post-wagon late one night. The *yamschik* (post-boy) stopped his weary *troika* before the one stone house at the entrance of the town. The sentry, a Black Sea Cossack, the moment he heard the tinkling of the bell, shouted, half asleep, in a fierce tone of voice: "Who goes there?" A sergeant and a corporal came out to me. I explained to them that I was an officer, on my way to join the army at the front, and demanded to have quarters assigned to me. The corporal took us all round the town. Whatever hut we stopped at proved to be occupied. It was cold; I had had three sleepless nights—I was getting cross.

"Take me anywhere at all, you scamp," I cried; "to the devil if need be, so you get me to some place at last."

"We might try one more," replied the man dubiously, scratching the back of his head; "but your honour won't like it; it isn't just canny."

Not understanding the exact meaning of the word, I ordered him to march ahead and a long peregrination among dirty lanes and alleys, on both sides of which I saw nothing but dilapidated fences, brought us to a small hut on the very edge of the shore.

A full moon shone brightly on the reeded roof and whitewashed walls of my prospective resting-place; in the yard, fenced in by a cobblestone enclosure, there stood, leaning over to one side, another hovel, older and smaller than the first. The shore fell sheer off to the sea almost from the very foot of its walls, and down there the dark blue waves splashed against the strand with an unceasing murmur. The moon serenely looked down on the restless element, submissive withal to her sway, and I was enabled by her light to make out, far away, two ships, whose black rigging, looking like cobwebs at this distance, stood out immovable against the pale line of the horizon. "Vessels in the harbour," thought I; "to-morrow I'm off to Gelendjik."

I ordered the Cossack of the line attached to my personal service to take down my trunk and dismiss the driver, then called for the owner. No answer. I knocked; still no answer. What could be the meaning of this? At length a lad of about fourteen crept out of the entrance passage.

"Where's the master?"

"Isn't any."

"What? No master at all?"

"None at all."

"The mistress, then?"

"Went off to the village."

"Then who's to open the door for me?" said I, at the same time giving it a kick. It opened of itself. A whiff of damp air blew in my face. I lit a match and held it under the lad's nose: the light showed me two white eyes. He was blind, entirely blind from birth. He stood before me, immovable, and I began to examine his features.

I confess to a strong prejudice against all blind, deaf, dumb persons, cripples, hunch-backs, etc. I have noticed that there invariably exists some strange correlation between the outer man and the soul; as though, in losing one of its organs the soul also lost some feeling.

So I began to examine the blind boy's features; but what can you read on an eyeless countenance? Long I gazed at him with involuntary compassion when, of a sudden, a scarce perceptible smile flitted across his thin lips and produced on me, I know not why, a most unpleasant impression. A suspicion flashed across my mind that he might not be as blind as he

seemed; vainly I strove to persuade myself that a cataract is hardly a thing that can be shammed; besides, why should he? For what purpose? But what was I to do? I am frequently given to prejudices.

"Are you the mistress's son?" I asked at length.

"No."

"Who, then, are you?"

"A poor infirm orphan."

"Has the mistress any children?"

"No. There was a daughter, but she went off, beyond the sea, with a Tatar fellow."

"What kind of a Tatar?"

"Devil a bit I know. A Crimean he was, a boatman from Kertch."

I entered the hut: two benches and a table, with a huge coffer near the oven made up all its furnishing. Not an ikon on the wall—an evil sign. Through a broken pane the wind came rushing in from the sea. I got a waxen candle-end out of my trunk and, having lit it, began to unpack my things, stood my sword and gun up in a corner, laid my pistols on the table, and spread my *burka** on one bench, while the Cossack spread his on the other; in ten minutes more he was snoring. But I found no sleep; the boy with the white eyeballs kept dancing before me.

About an hour may have passed in this way. The moonlight, entering the window, played on the earthen floor. All at once a shadow flitted across the bright bar intersecting it. I half raised myself and looked at the window; someone again ran past it and vanished, heaven knows where. I could not imagine anybody running down that bluff, yet there did not seem to be any other way. I rose, got into my tunic, buckled on my belt with the dagger attached to it, and quietly stole out of the hut; the blind boy was coming straight at me. I stepped aside and stood quite still against the fence, while the boy, with an assured but cautious gait, walked past me. He carried some sort of bundle under his arm and, turning towards the harbour, began to descend by a narrow and steep pathway. "On that day the dumb shall speak and the blind see," thought I, following him at such a distance as not to lose sight of him.

Clouds, meanwhile, were mantling the moon and a mist was rising from the sea, hardly allowing a gleam of the lantern lit at the prow of the nearest ship to pierce it; along the shore glistened the spray of the rollers, which threatened to flood it at any moment. Descending with difficulty I threaded my way down the steep incline and this is what I saw: the blind boy paused after reaching the bottom, then turned to the right; he walked so near the water, it seemed as though the next wave must get him and bear him away; but, judging by the surety with which he stepped from one boulder to another and avoided the holes, this was evidently not his first excursion of the kind. At last he stopped, seeming to listen, squatted down on the ground and laid the bundle by his side. Hiding behind a protruding cliff, I observed every movement. After a few minutes a white figure approached from the opposite side and sat down beside the boy. The wind from time to time brought me parts of their conversation

"Well," said a woman's voice, "it's blowing hard. Yanko won't come."

"Yanko is not afraid of a gale," replied the boy.

"The fog is growing denser, too," resumed the woman's voice in tones of sadness.

"In a fog it is easier to pass the ships," was the answer.

"What if he should get drowned?"

"Well, what if he should? You wouldn't have a new ribbon for church next Sunday."

A silence now ensued. One thing struck me; in speaking to me the boy had used the Ukrainian dialect, while now he spoke the purest Russian.

"You see, I was right," again began the blind boy, clapping his hands. "Yanko fears neither sea nor winds nor fogs nor coast-guards. Just listen: this is not the water splashing—it can't fool me; that's Yanko's long oars."

The woman sprang to her feet and peered into the distance with every sign of uneasiness.

"You are dreaming," she said. "I see nothing."

I must say, neither did I, hard as I strove to make out in the distance anything like a boat. This suspense lasted some ten minutes. Then, between two mountainlike

* The *burka* is a long and ample cloak (down to the feet) of felted cloth, with thick sheep's wool worked in on the outside. If laid out flat it would look simply like a circular garment with a hole cut out for the head and neck. The *burka*, exceedingly warm and impenetrable to rain or fog, is worn by Cossacks and all the Caucasus tribes.

waves, there appeared a black dot, now larger, now again smaller. Now slowly lifted to the crest of waves, now swiftly plunging into the trough below, a boat was approaching the shore. None but the most daring mariner would, on such a night, have ventured, twenty versts into the channel, and none but the most urgent business could have induced him thereto. With an involuntary quickening of the heart I gazed at the luckless boat; now diving like a duck, now, with a swift flourish of her oars, as of wings, leaping out of the abyss amid spume and spray; and now I thought she surely must be flung against the shore and dashed to pieces; but she lithely turned her side to the onset and bounded unharmed into the little cove. A man of middle height in a sheepskin cap, such as Tatars wear, sprang on land; he waved his hand and all three began to drag something out of the boat. The load was so heavy that I wonder to this day she did not sink under it. Each with a big bundle on their backs, they started along the shore and I soon lost sight of them. It was time for me to go back, but I confess that all these strange happenings disturbed me and I could hardly wait for the morning.

¶

MY Cossack was greatly astonished when, on waking, he saw me completely dressed. I did not tell him the reason, though. I stood for some time at the window, admiring the azure sky, studded with stray bits of ragged clouds, the purple line of Crimea's distant shore, ending in a cliff, surmounted by the white tower of a lighthouse—then walked to the fort of Phanagoria, to find out from the commanding officer at what time I should start for Gelendjik.

But alas, he could tell me nothing positive. The ships in the harbour were all either coastguard vessels or traders, which had, as yet, not even begun loading.

"In three or four days," he said, "the packet boat may come in; then we shall see."

I went home gloomy and cross. At the entrance I was met by my Cossack; he looked scared.

"Things look bad, your honour," he announced.

"Indeed they do, boy. God knows when we shall get away from here."

He bent down closer to me, getting more excited, and said:

"It is uncanny here. To-day I met the sergeant—we are acquainted, he was in my detachment last year. When I told him where we were stopping he said: 'It's uncanny there. The people are not right...' And really now, what kind of a blind boy is this? He goes about everywhere by himself, to market, for bread, for water; they seem to be quite used to it here."

"Well, and did the mistress show up, at least?"

"In your absence there came an old woman and her daughter."

"Daughter? Why, she has no daughter."

"Heaven knows then who she is if not her daughter. But there's the old woman now, sitting in the hut."

I went in. There was a hot fire in the oven and dinner was being cooked in it; a pretty luxurious one for poor people. To all my inquiries the old woman replied that she was deaf, could hear nothing. What was I to do with her? I turned to the blind boy. He was crouching before the oven, feeding the fire with dry sticks.

"See here, you blind imp," I said, taking hold of his ear, "tell me, where did you betake yourself last night with that bundle, eh?"

The fellow all at once burst into tears, with shrieks and moanings.

"Where did I go? Why, nowhere . . . with a bundle? What bundle?"

The old woman for once did hear and began to grumble:

"The idea. Inventing lies just to bother a poor unfortunate. What did he ever do to you?"

I went out, disgusted, but firmly resolved to get at the key of the mystery.

I wrapped my *burka* around me and sat down by the fence on a big stone, letting my eyes roam over the distance. Before me stretched the sea, still restless after the night's tempest, and its monotonous roar, not unlike the confused hum of a city settling down to sleep, recalled to my mind other days, bore my thoughts away to the north, to our cold capital. Stirred by memories, I forgot myself. . . . An hour may have passed in this way, possibly more. . . . Suddenly something like a song struck on my ear. It was a song all right, sung by a woman's fresh young voice. But where did it come from? . . . I listened intently. The melody was tuneful, now slow and sad, now quick and lively. I looked around me—not a soul within sight.

A Travelling Episode

I listened again—it was as though the sounds fell from heaven. I looked up: there, on the roof of my hut, stood a girl in a striped gown, her hair loose, a veritable Undine. Shading her eyes with her hand from the sun, she was gazing intently into the distance, now laughing and talking to herself, now resuming her song.

I remember that song word for word:

Lo, as freedom free,
O'er the waters green
Swiftly sweep the ships,
The white-sailed.

And amidst those ships
Speeds my little skiff,
My unrigged, two-oared boat,
Skimming the deep.

If the storm should play,
Then those brave old ships
Will raise up their wings,
Scatter o'er the sea.

To the seas I'll pray,
With a low, low bow:
"Touch thou not, O angry sea,
My little boat.

"For it bears a load
Of most precious things,
Steered through the murky night
By a daring hand."

I unconsciously remembered that I had heard the same voice in the night; I paused to think a minute and when I looked up at the roof once more the girl was gone. All at once she ran past me, humming some other tune and, snapping her fingers, ran into the hut and joined the old woman and straightway they began to quarrel. The old woman was angry, the girl laughed boisterously. The next minute my Undine ran out again, skipping along and, stopping before me, looked fixedly in my eyes, as though wondering at my being there, then turned scornfully away and walked off to the harbour. Nor was this the end of it. All day long she was around; the singing and skipping never let up a minute. Strange creature that she was. Her face showed no signs of insanity; on the contrary, she eyed me with alert shrewdness in her gaze and her eyes seemed endowed with some kind of magnetic power and every time appeared to expect an answer. But the moment I began to speak she would run away, throwing me a teasing smile.

Decidedly never had I seen a woman like her. She was far from being a beauty; but I have ideas of my own on the subject of beauty, too. There was race in the girl, plenty of it. Now, race in women, as blood in horses, is a great thing; this is a discovery due to young France. It (race, I mean, not France) is mostly apparent in the gait, the hands and feet; the nose, especially, is of very great importance. A regular nose is rarer in Russia than a small foot. My songstress appeared not more than eighteen. Her unusually flexible form, an inclination of the head peculiar entirely to herself, her long fair tresses, a certain golden-tinted bloom on the slightly sunburned skin of her neck and shoulders and, above all, her regular nose—all this together made up an exceedingly—to me—fascinating whole. Although I read in her oblique looks something wild and suspicious, although her smile had in it something indefinite, yet such is the force of prejudice, her regular nose had me crazy. I fancied I had found Goethe's Mignon, that whimsical creation of his German imagination; and, truly, the two had much in common; the same swift passing from greatest restlessness to absolute quietude, the same enigmatical speeches, the same skippings and weird songs.

Towards evening I detained her at the door and entered into conversation with her.

"Tell me, my beauty," I began, "what were you doing this morning on the roof?"

"Looking which way the wind blew."

"What did you want to know that for?"

"What way the wind comes, that way comes happiness."

"Did you, then, think to entice happiness with your singing?"

"Where there is singing, there happiness comes to roost."

"And suppose it's sorrow that hears your call?"

"Well, it may be ill fortune instead of good; but then again, after ill fortune good fortune is not so very far away."

"Who taught you that song?"

"No one. Things come to me, then I sing. It is for them as can hear; and those as can't, my song is not for them."

"And what may be your name, my singing bird?"

"Them as christened me know."

"And who did christen you?"

"How should I know?"

"How secretive you are. All the same I have found out something about you." (There was no change in her face, no twitching of the lip; it was as though she were not concerned at all.) "I know that

you went to the strand last night." And I gravely told her all I had seen, thinking to put her out of countenance. Nothing of the kind. She broke into immoderate laughter.

"You may have seen, but you don't know much—and what you do know better keep under lock and key."

"And what if the fancy took me to tell the commandant at the fort?" Saying which I put on a very serious, even stern, mien.

She suddenly gave a leap, burst into song and vanished, like a bird frightened out of a bush. My last words were very much out of place. I did not then realise their importance, but it was not long before I had occasion to repent of them.

¶

AS soon as it was twilight I ordered my Cossack to set our campaign-kettle to boil, lit a candle and sat down by the table to smoke my travelling pipe. I was finishing my second glass of tea when the door creaked and I heard a light rustle of steps and skirts behind me; I started and turned round: it was she, my Undine. Quietly and silently she sat down opposite to me and fixed her gaze on me—and that glance somehow seemed to me wonderfully tender; it put me in mind of those other glances which, in days gone by, used to play such havoc with my life. She seemed to expect some question, but I kept still, unaccountably disturbed in my whole being. Her face was covered with a dull pallor, which betrayed inner agitation; her hand was aimlessly wandering over the table and I noticed a slight tremor in it; her breast now rose high, now appeared to hold in the breath. I began to find this comedy tiresome and I was about to break the silence in the most prosaic manner, simply by offering her a glass of tea, when suddenly she sprang up and threw her arms around my neck and a moist, resounding kiss burned my lips. A darkness obscured my sight, my brain reeled; I pressed her in my arms with all the force of youthful passion. But she, with serpentine agility slipped out of my embrace, whispering in my ear: "To-night, when all are asleep, descend to the strand"—and was out of the room as an arrow shot from the bow. Outside she knocked over the kettle and the candle which was burning on the floor.

"What a demon of a girl!" exclaimed my Cossack, who had just made himself comfortable on some straw and was preparing to warm himself with what was left of the tea. Then only I came to my senses. Two hours later, when all was hushed about the harbour, I roused my Cossack: "If I fire my pistol," said I to him, "run down to the strand."

He stared at me and answered mechanically, "Very well, your honour." I stuck my pistol in my belt and went. She was awaiting me at the edge of the bluff. She was clothed more than lightly; a large shawl girded her slender form.

"Follow me," she said, taking my hand, and we began the descent. That I did not break my neck is a mystery to me. We turned to the right and took the same path along which I had watched the blind boy's movements. The moon had not risen yet; only two little stars, like the guiding flames of lighthouses, twinkled on the dark blue vault. Heavy waves rhythmically and evenly rolled up one after another, scarcely lifting the solitary skiff moored at the shore.

"Get in," said my companion.

I hesitated. I am not partial to sentimental excursions on the sea. But there was no time to retreat. The girl jumped lightly into the boat; I followed and, before I knew it, we were afloat.

"What is the meaning of this?" I enquired angrily.

"It means," replied she, forcing me down on the bench and flinging her arms around my body in a tight embrace, "it means that I love you."

Her cheek was pressed against mine and I felt her hot breath on my face. Suddenly there was the noisy splash of a heavy object falling into the water. I quickly felt my belt—my pistol was gone. Then a terrible suspicion arose in me, the blood rushed to my head. I looked around me; we were about forty yards from the shore and I cannot swim. I tried to push her from me; she clutched my clothes like a cat and a sudden violent shove nearly had me in the water. The boat rocked, but I kept my balance and now began a desperate struggle. Rage gave me strength, but I soon became aware that I was no match for my adversary in agility.

"What is it you want?" I shouted, squeezing her slender fingers till they cracked; but she made no sound, her serpentine nature stood the torture.

"You saw . . . you will tell," she gasped and, by a superhuman effort, flung me across the side of the boat; we both hung half over, her hair touching the water. It was a critical moment. I braced myself with one knee against the bottom of the boat, took hold of a braid of her hair with one hand and seized her throat with the other. She let go of my clothes and in an instant I had thrown her overboard.

It was pretty dark; her head showed once or twice amid the foam; then I saw nothing more.

At the bottom of the boat I found half of an old oar and somehow, after long efforts, managed to land. Threading my way along the shore towards my hut, I involuntarily kept looking in the direction of the spot where, the night before, the blind boy had awaited the coming of the nightly visitor. The moon now rode high in the sky and I thought I saw a white figure sitting on the strand. I stole that way, actuated by curiosity and, crouching low in the grass, advanced my head a little, so that, from the top of the cliff I could see all that was going on below and I was not too much astonished, indeed, rather glad, when I recognised my Undine. She was pressing the water out of her long hair, her wet, clinging garment betraying the outline of her splendid bust. Soon a boat appeared in the distance and rapidly approached. Just as yesterday a man in a Tatar cap stepped out of it; but his hair was cut after the Cossack fashion and a big knife was stuck in his leather belt.

"Yanko," she cried, "all is lost."

Their further conversation was carried on in tones so low I could make out nothing.

"Where is the blind boy?" Yanko enquired at last, raising his voice.

"I sent him . . ." she answered.

A few minutes later the boy made his appearance, loaded with a heavy sack, which they proceeded to stow into the boat.

"Listen, fellow," said Yanko. "Guard that place well—you know which I mean; there are precious wares there. . . . Tell ——" (I could not make out the name) "that I won't serve him any longer, business is getting bad; he shan't see me again. It's too risky now. I'm going to look for work somewhere else and he won't find another such daredevil fool to work for him. And tell him if he paid better Yanko would not leave him. As for me, there is room for me wherever winds blow and waters roar."

After a brief pause he went on. "She is going with me; she can't stay here after this. And tell the old woman it's high time she should die; she is overstaying her time. There's a limit to all things. As for us, she'll never see us any more."

"And what of me?" plaintively whimpered the boy.

"What use are you to me?" was the brutal reply.

Meanwhile my Undine had leapt into the boat and now she waved her hand to her companion. He thrust something into the blind boy's hand, saying: "There, buy yourself some gingerbread."

"Is that all?" protested the boy.

"Well, here's some more," and a coin fell clanking on the rocks. The boy did not pick it up.

Yanko stepped into the boat. The wind blew from the shore; they raised the little sail and were swiftly borne out to sea. For quite a while the sail gleamed white under the moonbeams from amidst the dark billows; the blind boy sat on and on and suddenly I heard something like a sob; he actually wept—wept a long, long time. . . . I felt sorry for him. And what need had fate to throw me into this peaceful nest of honest smugglers? Like a stone, suddenly cast into a quiet pond, I disturbed the even tenor of their existence and, like that stone, very nearly went to the bottom myself.

I went home. In the small entrance passage a burned-down candle was sputtering on a wooden platter and my Cossack, in spite of orders, was sleeping soundly, his gun held tight in both hands. I let him alone, took the candle and entered the hut. Alas, my travelling casket, my silver-mounted sword, my Daghestan dagger, a friend's gift—everything was gone. Then I guessed what it was that accursed blind boy was hauling. I roused my Cossack rather discourteously, I'm afraid, gave him a scolding, grumbled a bit, but there was nothing to be done. And would I not have looked ridiculous complaining to my superior officers of having been robbed by a blind boy and all but drowned by a girl of eighteen! Thank God next morning an opportunity offered to leave Tamagne, and I did. What became of the old woman and that poor blind rascal I never knew. And what, after all, did the joys and sorrows of men matter to me, an army officer travelling on government business with a government order for post-horses? . . .

Part One of a brilliant novel

Barbary Sheep

The most vivid of this author's celebrated Eastern romances

By ROBERT HICHENS

SIR CLAUDE WYVERNE was a simple and rather heavy young Englishman, who had married a very frivolous wife, and who adored her. Adoration leads to abnegation, and Sir Claude, as soon as he was a married man, began to give way to Lady Wyverne. She was a very pretty and changeable blonde. Any permanence seemed to her dull; and this trait secretly agitated her husband, who desired to be permanent in her life and not to be thought dull by her. In order to achieve this result, he decided to present himself as often as possible to Lady Wyverne in the seductive guise of change-giver. He was perpetually occupied in devising novelties to keep up her butterfly spirits and in anticipating her every whim.

One spring, just as Sir Charles thought they were going at last to settle down in a pretty country place they had in Leicestershire, Lady Wyverne expressed a sudden wish to " run over " to Algiers.

" Caroline Barchester and her bear have gone there, Crumpet," she said. " Let's go, too. I'll get an introduction to the ex-Queen of Madagascar and the Prince of Annam—they're in exile there, you know—and we'll have some fun and see something new. I'm tired of ordinary people. Let's start on Tuesday. We'll stay in Paris *en route*."

Of course Sir Claude assented. They started for Algiers on the Tuesday, and they stayed in Paris *en route*.

While they were in Paris they went, against Sir Claude's will, to visit a famous astrologer called Dr. Mélie Etoile, about whom everybody—Lady Wyverne's everybody—happened to be raving at that moment. Lady Wyverne went into this worthy's presence first, leaving her husband —looking unusually English even for him—seated in the waiting-room, a small chamber all cane chairs, artificial flowers, and signs of the zodiac, heated by steam, and carefully shrouded, at the tiny windows, by bead blinds.

After perhaps half an hour Lady Wyverne came out in a state of violent excitement.

" He's extraordinary ! " she exclaimed. " He's a genius ! A little bearded thing like a mouse, who—Go in, Crumpet ! "

But Sir Claude protested. He had only come to bring his wife. He himself was an absolute sceptic in matters occult, and indeed thought almost everything at all out of the way " damned silly." The idea of submitting himself to an astrologer called " Mélie " roused all his British antagonism. But Lady Wyverne was firm. Indeed, her caprices generally had a good deal of cast-iron in them. In rather less than three minutes, therefore, Sir Claude was sitting at a tiny table opposite to a small old man with a white beard and pink eyes, and answering questions about the hour of night when he was born, the date of the year, his illnesses, and various other small matters till then regarded by him as strictly private. Eventually he came out, holding a folded paper in his hand, and looking a good deal like a well-bred poker.

" Silly rot ! " he muttered, as he entered the outer room where his wife was awaiting him among the signs of the zodiac and the waxen peonies.

" What's silly rot ? " cried Lady Wyverne.

" What that chap says."

" What does he say ? "

" Oh, a lot of rot. I s'pose he thought I couldn't understand him, or he wanted an extra guinea. Anyhow he's written it all down here."

He held out the paper, which his wife eagerly seized. After glancing over the red and purple writing on it, she exclaimed:

" Mars ! That's this month. This is March the first."

" I know. Rot, isn't it ? "

" Mars," continued Lady Wyverne, reading aloud, " période de luttes, de contestations, d'anxiété, et même de peines de cœur. Eviter de partir en voyage la nuit. Danger d'une——"

She stopped. Her childish, oval face was unusually grave.

"Rot, isn't it?" said Sir Claude, gazing at his wife with anxiety in his eyes.

II

THE ex-Queen of Madagascar was very gracious in her villa on the hill above Algiers. The Prince of Annam showed Sir Claude his horses, at which Sir Claude scarcely looked, as he was thoroughly preoccupied by the little bag in which his agreeable host confined his luxuriant crop of black hair. Caroline Barchester and her bear, who was also her husband, had plenty of gossip to tell the Wyvernes in the pretty garden of the Hôtel St. Georges at Mustapha. Yet by March 10th Lady Wyverne had had enough of Algiers.

"Let's get on, Crumpet," she said to her husband. "We've seen the Queen and the Moorish Bath—at least you've seen it—and the Governor's Palace and Cap Matifou and all the rest of it. So let's get on towards the desert."

Sir Claude looked unusually grim and mulish.

"I didn't know we were going to the desert," he said.

"Why, of course. What did we come for?"

"To see Algiers, I thought."

"Nonsense! Algiers is as French as the Rue de la Paix. I want to know all about camels and sand-dunes and Ouled—what are they? Get two berths in the sleeping-car for El-Akbara; there's a dear. It's at the gate of the desert, you know. We'll stay the night and then trot on to Beni-Mora."

Then, as he still looked mulish, she added, mischievously:

"Or I shall think you're silly enough to believe in Mélie Etoile's prophecy."

"Rot!" said Sir Claude. "A fellow like a white——"

"Very well, then, get the tickets!"

He went at once to Cook's and got the tickets, but he looked very grave, almost distressed, as he returned to the hotel. And all that evening he scarcely took his eyes from his wife's pretty, rather doll-like, face.

"I believe you do believe!" she said to him, as they were going up to bed. "'*Danger d'une grande perte*'—that was what he wrote—'*la plus grande perte possible.*' What would be the greatest loss possible to you?"

"You ought to know," he replied, almost harshly.

And he caught her little hand and wrung it.

"Oh, Crumpet, my rings!" she cried.

But she left her hand in his, and added, on the landing:

"As if you could lose me out here! Crumpet, you're more foolish than I am, and I'm one mass of superstition, even about going under ladders."

"Then you do believe that pink-eyed astrologer chap?"

"Of course not. Bed, bed, beautiful bed!"

In the evening of the next day they arrived at El-Akbara, but not without a little adventure on the way. Near a station called Kreir the train ran off the line, and Lady Wyverne, though not hurt, was a good deal shaken and very much frightened. When, after a long delay, they started again, she and her husband sat opposite to each other in a moody silence. Sir Claude seemed specially oppressed, and smoked cigar after cigar with almost feverish rapidity. Only when they had left the train and were being driven to the little inn, where they were to spend the night, did they both brighten and begin to return to their normal spirits.

"What an extraordinary little place, Crumpet!" said Lady Wyverne, peering through her veil at the towering rocks which formed a terrific wall, dividing the desert from the Tell. "But where's the Sahara?"

"I dunno, Kitty," returned Sir Claude. "Wonder if there's any shooting in those mountains."

"Why, it's getting quite cold!" cried Lady Wyverne, as the carriage rattled into a narrow gorge of the rocks full of shadows and of the sound of rushing waters. "One would never suppose that the desert—— Here's the hotel!"

The carriage had stopped before a solitary house which stood in the heart of the gorge on the edge of a turmoil of absinthe-coloured water. Stupendous battlements of rock reared themselves up round about it towards the clear blue sky. In front of it grew a line of Judas-trees along the white road, which is the caravan route from the Tell to the Sahara. It was small, low, but clean and inviting-looking, with a wide veranda and French windows with green shutters.

"Tea on the veranda!" cried Lady Wyverne. "Tea—tea—and then—where's the desert?"

The landlady, a plump and pleasant French-woman of middle age and motherly appearance, explained that it lay immediately beyond the wall of rock. Five minutes' walk through the gorge and "Madame" would be there. Lady Wyverne was all excitement. She quite forgot her shaking and fright, and as soon as she had swallowed a cup of tea she made her husband accompany her down the road towards the natural portal which the Arabs call "The Gate of the Sahara." He had been below, conferring with a tall Arab guide, who now walked beside them needlessly to show the way, and he said to his wife, with considerable animation:

"I say, Kitty, what d'you think? This chap says there's splendid sport here, any amount of Barbary sheep up in those rocks, and herds of gazelle in the plain just beyond. D'you think you'd mind spendin' a couple o' nights here instead of one? I could get up to-morrow at three o'clock and be off to get a shot at somethin'. What d'you think?"

He looked at her anxiously.

"I'll tell you in a minute, Crumpet, when I've—— Oh!"

She uttered a little cry and stood still, clutching her husband's arm. They had come out into the desert and were facing the sunset. Abruptly the world had changed. A glory of colour dazzled their eye. The river, now flowing quietly, wound away into the bosom of an oasis of magnificent palm-trees that lay in a measureless expanse of pale-yellow earth covered with scattered crystals. To the left stretched a distant mountain range, dim purple beneath the rose of the sunset. And from three Arab villages of brown houses scattered among the palms came the cries of children, the barking of dogs, and the faint sounds of African drums and hautboys.

Under a great rock by the riverside sat an Arab boy piping a tune that was like caprice personified in music.

"Oh, Crumpet!" said Lady Wyverne, after a little pause of contemplation, "how strange it is and how—how——"

She caught her breath. There were tears in her eyes.

"Camels! Camels!" she cried. "Look, Crumpet!"

A caravan was winding out of the gorge, a train of laden camels, and bare-footed, dark-faced men in fluttering ragged garments.

"Doosid picturesque," assented Sir Claude. "To get a shot at the sheep you have to——"

"Yes, yes, I know."

"Well, but how can you——"

"I tell you I know—I know. We'll stay two nights. Go off to-morrow at three and kill whatever you like. Only let me stay and explore those villages and wander among those palms."

"You can't go alone."

"I'll take a guide."

"I'll find out at the hotel if there's one that's all right," muttered Sir Claude. "This fellow always goes with the sportsmen. I say, Kitty, I'm feelin' awful hungry."

"You mundane thing!" said Lady Wyverne, shrugging her shoulders.

But she turned back and they made their way to the inn, which was now shrouded in the deep shadows of the rapidly approaching night.

At dinner the only other person in the room was a very smart and handsome young Arab, who, the waiter told them, was an officer in the Spahis, and was stationed at Algiers, but who was now on leave and going to the home of his father, an important Caïd in the Zibans district. Lady Wyverne looked at the guest with interest. He wore a snowy turban and a red jacket, and between the white and red his magnificent black eyes sparkled impudently, and his teeth gleamed as he smiled at the waiter, to whom he addressed a few words in excellent French. His face was extraordinarily expressive, brilliant, but cruel and startlingly intelligent.

All through dinner Sir Claude was talking about Barbary sheep, and directly dinner was over he said:

"I say, Kitty, s'pose we turn in."

"Turn in!" said Lady Wyverne. "Why, it's only eight o'clock!"

"I know, but you're awfully done up with that accident and all, and——"

"You mean that you're sleepy and that you've got to be up at three to kill some wretched sheep. Go to bed, Crumpet; but I'm going to stay out on the veranda. and look at the moon."

Sir Claude cast a drowsy glance towards the young Spahi, who had just picked up a walnut out of a fruit-dish and was holding

it delicately in his slim, almost womanish fingers. The Spahi looked demurely down.

"Well, Kitty, I think I will turn in. You see, if I don't get enough sleep, there's no knowin' to-morrow whether——"

"You'll hit the wretched sheep or pot your guide. I know. Trot along."

Sir Claude turned to trot. A sharp little sound rang through the room. He looked round. The Spahi had cracked the nut with his fingers, and was smiling gently as he tenderly extracted the kernel.

"I dunno that I am ready for bed," began Sir Claude. "P'r'aps I'll have a smoke first on——"

"No, no; the bolster calls you. I know by the lobster look in your dear old eyes. Come along, Crumpet!"

She vanished from the room followed by her husband.

The Spahi looked after them, got up, lit a cigarette, and strolled out into the little paved enclosure above which the veranda projected. He leaned his shoulder against a pillar and stood there motionless, staring towards the Judas-trees and the white road that wound away among the shadows of the gorge towards the desert.

III

SIR CLAUDE went to bed, of course. He always did what his wife told him to do. Lady Wyverne tucked him up, and then, followed by the familiar sound of his first snore, went out on to the veranda beneath which the young Spahi was standing. He heard the rustle of her gown above him in the still night, and smiled. Brilliant stars sparkled in the sky, and the thread of road that wound through the gorge to the Sahara was lit up by a round white moon. In the hotel the landlady, her family, and the servants were supping cheerfully. Nobody was about. After a minute the Spahi moved away from the pillar against which he had been leaning, to the wooden railing beneath the Judas-trees, which divided the small, paved courtyard of the inn from the road. He turned and stood with his back against it, facing the veranda, but he did not look up. Standing there motionless, he appeared to be wrapped in a profound reverie. Lady Wyverne watched him curiously. His large, white turban looked ghostly in the moonlight, she thought. Why did he stand there motionless? Of what could he be thinking? This place, so unlike any place she had ever before seen, puzzled her. This motionless man puzzled her, too. The frivolity of her spirit was led captive by this African solitude in the night, on the edge of a greater solitude, the vast and unknown desert in which this man, who stood like a statue beneath her, had been born and bred, to which he was now returning. A sensation almost of awe crept over her, and she began to wonder. When a woman begins to wonder there is no limit to her mental journeyings. Lady Wyverne had travelled very far when a strange sound startled her and arrested her attention.

It was a voice singing, or rather murmuring, an uncouth tune, a soft, whining, almost babyish voice. From whom did it come?

She could see no one except the young Spahi, and it did not occur to her at first that the voice could proceed from a man's mouth. She listened, leaning over the balustrade. The voice went on singing until it seemed to her as if it had become one with the night, almost as it if were the voice of the night in this rocky solitude at the edge of the sands. The tune was ugly, she thought, but it interested her. Had she spoken of it, she would probably have said that it was "so weird." She had never before heard anything at all resembling it. By degrees the singing began to affect her almost painfully, to play upon her nerves, to make her restless and uneasy. She took her arms from the rail of the veranda. Who was the singer? She tried to locate the sound, and presently it seemed to her that it came from the spot where the Spahi was standing. Was it really he who was singing? Was it a—a serenade?

She smiled. Her swift vanity was awake. When she moved the Spahi moved too. He walked softly across the little court, lifted his head towards the veranda and showed Lady Wyverne his dark face with the lips moving. He was the singer, and now, almost insolently, he sent the song to her.

Ever since she had "come out" Lady Wyverne had been accustomed to admiration, even to worship—such worship as modern smart men have at their command to give to a pretty woman. But this strange, whining serenade from an African was a new experience. The boldness of the dark face turned upward to her in the moonlight,

and the babyish sound of the voice that issued from its lips, formed a combination that stirred her neurotic temperament ever impatient in the search after novelty. Almost ere she realised what she was doing, she had smiled at the Spahi. He stopped singing and smiled up at her. Then he spoke, as if to speak with her were the most natural thing in the world.

"Has madame ever seen the desert under the moon?"

Lady Wyverne started and half drew back. This really was carrying things very far.

"Madame is coming down?" said the Spahi, misinterpreting the movement with a delightful, boyish insolence.

Before she knew that she was speaking, Lady Wyverne had said, in French:

"Certainly not."

"It is a pity. Five minutes and madame could see the desert in the moonlight. There is nothing to fear."

He put his hand down for an instant, then lifted it, and Lady Wyverne saw the moonlight glittering on the polished steel of a revolver. The sparkle fascinated her eyes more than the sparkle of the stars.

"I'm not afraid," she said.

This time she spoke deliberately. The imp, caprice, by which she was always governed, whispered to her:

"This is a new bit of fun! Don't be such a fool as to avoid it."

"But madame does not care to see the desert?"

At this moment he noticed that Lady Wyverne's blue eyes had travelled away from his face and were gazing at something behind him. He turned, and saw a train of camels and nomads stealing by the inn on their way to the desert. Noiselessly they padded on the narrow thread of road. The nomads were muffled in ragged hoods and fluttering cloaks, and carried clubs. With their birdlike eyes staring before them, they passed like phantoms into the shadows of the gorge. Their appearance and disappearance woke up in Lady Wyverne a vague sense of romance and mystery, a longing to follow these strange men and their beasts into the silver world which lay beyond the shadows.

She slipped across the veranda and peeped into Sir Claude's room. He was snoring bravely.

"Dreaming of Barbary sheep!" murmured Lady Wyverne. "If only Crumpet were a little bit more—h'm!"

She sighed, caught up a cloak, and went softly downstairs.

The Spahi met her in the courtyard. The impudence of his demeanour had vanished, and he bowed with a ceremonious gravity which surprised Lady Wyverne, who was unaccustomed to the rapid and complete changes of manner so common among Orientals.

"Will not monsieur come too?" he asked simply.

"Monsieur!"

Lady Wyverne looked into his great eyes with a staring amazement.

"Monsieur is asleep," she added, recovering herself.

"So early!"

There was the least hint of sarcasm in his voice.

"He is going after Barbary sheep to-morrow morning at three o'clock," said Lady Wyverne, rather sharply.

The Spahi looked steadily into her pretty, blonde face.

"Barbary sheep!" he repeated. "Barbary sheep!"

There was a note of pity in his voice.

"May I put madame's cloak round her?" he added, after a pause.

"I—I'm not going out," said Lady Wyverne.

"But—the cloak?" he said, gravely.

And he took it from her hands and, swiftly and gracefully, with an extraordinary deftness, put it round her.

"Come, madame!"

"But——"

He opened the gate.

"It is only five minutes. In a quarter of an hour we are here and madame has seen—ah, a thing more wonderful than she has ever seen in England."

He held the gate open. Lady Wyverne stepped out into the road.

Next morning at three o'clock, when the stars were still shining, Lady Wyverne heard her husband moving about heavily in his room. Presently he came to her door, opened it with elaborate caution, and passed in, holding a candle in his hand. A gun was slung over his shoulder. She lay still, with her eyes shut, and after a moment he shut the door and she heard him tramp down the stairs. His footsteps died away. Then she heard outside a faint sound of voices, the clatter of mules. He was gone. She sighed. She was asking herself why she had feigned

sleep. But she did not answer her own question.

"I hope he'll have luck," she thought. "I do hope he'll kill something."

And then she really slept.

In the afternoon at five o'clock Sir Claude rode up to the inn door in wild spirits. Behind him, slung across a mule, was a dead Barbary sheep.

"Grand sport!" he exclaimed, looking up at his wife, who was on the veranda sitting on a straw chair. "I waited for hours to get a shot, and—I say, Kit, you haven't been borin' yourself to death?"

"No, Crumpet."

"Jolly little place, isn't it? I shouldn't mind spending a week here."

"Very well," she answered.

"You don't mind?" he exclaimed.

"I'll do just as you like."

"You are a brick, Kitty! You see, there's gazelle in the plain, too, and——"

"I know, I know."

He pounded up the stairs to kiss her.

"Poor old Crumpet!" she thought.

And she felt as if she were being kissed by a small school-boy.

That evening at dinner they were alone.

"The Spahi chap's gone?" asked Sir Claude, with an indifferent and sleepy glance round.

"I don't think so. I saw him about to-day. Perhaps he's got friends in the village and is eating a cous-cous with them."

"A what?"

"A cous-cous—a stew—rice, or something, and mutton and spices."

"Jove, Kitty, you are up in all this Arab rot! How the deuce do you pick up such a lot of information about it?"

"There is a book called *Murray*," she answered dryly. "Do you go to bed at eight to-night?"

"Well, I'm pretty well done up. You see, startin' off at three again to-morrow. You were sleepin' like a top last night when I looked in."

"Ah," she said. "Now I know how tops sleep."

"What d'you mean?"

"Nothing. Go to bed, old boy."

Without much persuasion he obeyed the command. Barbary sheep had made him very tired. He could almost have slept standing like a horse that night.

IV

"WAS the cous-cous good?" asked Lady Wyverne, half an hour later.

She and the Spahi were walking together slowly down the moonlit road between the towering rocks of the gorge, whose fantastic silhouettes, black beneath the deep-purple sky of night, looked like the silhouettes of the rocks in one of Doré's pictures of the Inferno. The noise of the rushing waters of the river was in their ears and almost drowned the murmur of their voices as they spoke to each other.

"I could not eat, madame."

"Why not?"

"I was thinking of your departure to-morrow, and of mine—far into the Zibans, to the house of my father."

"Absurd!" she said, with a little shrug of her shoulders. "I had an excellent appetite."

He was silent. To-night he wore over his shoulders a great red cloak, which swung gently to and fro as he walked on with the magnificent dignity and pride which are the birthright of the Arab race. She glanced at him sideways, with a birdlike turn of her little head.

"Besides," she added, "I'm not going away to-morrow."

His eyes flashed on her like fire.

"Madame?"

"No, we stay some days more. Barbary sheep, you know!" And she laughed, but rather mirthlessly.

"Will you have to ride from Beni-Mora?" she added. "The railway ends there, doesn't it?"

"Yes, madame. From there I shall ride.'

"How many days?"

"Three days."

"And always in the desert?"

"Always in the desert."

"And then you will reach your home. How strange!"

She was thinking of Chester Street, Belgrave Square, in which she had first seen the light. What a gulf was fixed between her and this man with whom she was now adventurously walking through this savage solitude! And yet his cloak, as it swung, touched the skirt of her gown, and she could see the fire sparkling in his eyes as he bent his head down when she spoke to him. And she—she had a capricious desire to find some bridge across this gulf, to venture upon it, to bring Chester

Street to the Zibans. She was not stupid, and, being a woman, she was intuitive, and so it never occurred to her even for a moment that the Zibans could ever be brought to Chester Street.

The sound of the river sank to a softer note as its bed widened out, leaving space for the released waters to flow quietly towards the palm-trees of the first oasis. Through the great natural aperture in the wall of rock a vague vision of glimmering spaces showed itself, like a mirage of eternity washed with silver. Lady Wyverne stood still.

"No farther," she said. "This was where we stopped last night."

"One step farther to-night, madame!" said the Spahi. "One little step."

"No, no."

He pointed with his hand outstretched and the red folds of his cloak flowing down from his arm.

"But it calls us."

"What?"

"The desert, madame. Listen!"

Lady Wyverne looked at him. He had spoken with so much authority that she did not smile at his remark or think it ridiculous. She even listened, like one in expectation of some distant sound, some voice from the far away that lay beyond the spaces her eyes could see. But in the deep silence of the night she heard only the murmur of the river flowing into the moving shadows of the palms.

"There's no voice," she said, at last.

"There is a voice for me," he answered. "But I am a son of the desert."

"Do you love it?"

"I belong to it. It has no secrets from me. I have learned all its lessons."

"Could I learn them?"

She spoke with a sort of modesty very unusual in her.

"Only with one who belongs to the desert."

"Then I shall never learn them," she said, with a sort of half-childish regret.

"Why not?"

"Why not? What an absurd question!"

"One can learn what one chooses to learn. I"—he spoke proudly—"I have learned to be a French officer."

"I really don't feel equal to learning to be an Arab woman," she rejoined, rather petulantly. "Besides, you know as well as I do that men can do a thousand things women can't do."

"Even a woman can go a step farther," he said.

"Oh—well—that's not very important. I don't mind."

And she walked on.

He smiled as he followed her.

When they came out of the gorge they were in the full flood of the moonlight. The change from the confined space of the gorge to this immensity of the desert was startling, and a sudden sense of loneliness and danger rushed upon Lady Wyverne. Abruptly she realised that this caprice of hers, besides being extremely unconventional, might be something more. She thought of "Crumpet" snoring peacefully in the hotel, and for the first time wished that she had not left his side. The Spahi, watching her face in the bright moonlight, read with the swift certainty of the Arab, always horribly acute in summing up the character and flying thoughts of the European, all that was passing in her mind and answered it in a sentence.

"She who loves the strange must not fear to face it," he said quietly.

Lady Wyverne reddened. She was made half angry by his intelligence and his assurance. Nevertheless, they fascinated her. She was accustomed to understand men much more thoroughly than they understood her. This man put her down from her seat of the mighty and calmly sank into it himself. He puzzled her immensely, but she felt certain that she did not puzzle him at all.

"I am not afraid of anything," she said. "You don't understand me."

She stopped in the road.

"One may choose not to do a thing without being afraid of doing it."

"But if it is a thing one longs to do, madame?"

He moved on a step, then looked back at Lady Wyverne as if summoning her. She stood firm, and he stopped with serene resignation.

"What on earth are we talking about?" she said, shrugging her little shoulders perversely.

"Your step farther."

"I have taken it. And now I'm going back."

"And to-morrow?"

"To-morrow you will not be here."

"But—if I, too, should be tempted to remain; Barbary sheep, you know, madame, Barbary sheep!"

He laughed softly.

"To-morrow I shall go to bed at half-past eight," replied Lady Wyverne, with an air of virtue that was too violent to be quite convincing. "The atmosphere of the desert tires me."

"And to me it gives life."

He was so close to her that she felt the warmth of his great red cloak, and smelt the faint odour of some strange Oriental perfume that clung to his garments.

"That is the difference between us," he added. "I am awake and alive. You are dozing. And he—he is fast asleep."

"He—who?" she said, startled by his tone.

"Milord, your husband. But though you are dozing, you are not asleep. You could be awake as I am awake. You could be alive as I am alive, if only——"

He stopped speaking and looked down at her.

"If only—what?"

"If only you were not afraid of being alive and of feeling joy."

He seemed to tower over her. He had stretched out one arm and the great cloak made him look vast in the night, vast and enveloping. The perfume that came from the folds of his scarlet and white clothes suggested mystery and something else, a distant ecstasy that might be reached by travelling, by going forward and onward.

"For you are afraid," he said. "You are very much afraid."

At that moment there was a shrill cry in the darkness of the gorge, a cry that sounded half human, half animal. Lady Wyverne started and instinctively clung to the Spahi's arm. Instantly the warm folds of his cloak were round her. The cry rose up once more, shrill, prolonged, and nearer. Then out of the gorge, into the moonlight that lay upon the road, there came a man capering and running. His face was fair and pale, like the face of a Christ in a picture, with a curling, yellow-brown beard and vacant, restless, blue eyes. In his thin hands he held an enormous staff. He was dressed in bright green, and on his head there was a green-and-red turban.

"Allah!" he shrieked, whirling the staff round and round, then pointing it suddenly to left and right. "Allah! Allah! Al——"

Lady Wyverne cowered against the Spahi. To her strung-up imagination it seemed as if the gorge had suddenly let loose a crazy Messiah to point at her a finger of condemnation. She trembled as the strange figure stopped before her, as its shrill cry died away in a childish whimper, and its large, pale eyes rested upon hers in a glance of dull amazement.

"What is——?" she began stammering.

"It is only the mad Marabout," said the Spahi, keeping his arm round her protectively.

"The mad Marabout?"

"He was a rich man of the village of Akbara, the red village, and loved a dancing-girl of Beni-Mora. One night in the week of the races the girl was murdered for her jewels by a Mehari rider from Touggourt. Since then he has been mad. He lives always out-of-doors. He eats only what he is given, what is put into his hand. He sleeps upon the ground. By night he wanders, seeking the girl who is dead and calling upon Allah to assist him. Allah! Allah!"

Suddenly the Spahi lifted up his voice in a powerful cry. Instantly the Marabout began once more to whirl his staff.

"Allah!" he shrieked. "Allah! Allah!"

And he capered along the road towards the desert, striking to right and left of him as if attacking the moonbeams that bore him company.

"He sees the murderer of Ayesha in every ray of the light-giver," said the Spahi.

"Why not in us, then?" said Lady Wyverne, with a shudder.

"Who knows why? Who can read in the soul of the madman?"

The Marabout was lost in the night, and suddenly Lady Wyverne was aware of the arm enclosing her. She moved quickly and it fell from about her. But as she walked on she still seemed to feel it, as one who has been touched by a powerful hypnotist seems to feel the magnetic hand long after it has been removed.

V

THAT night, as Lady Wyverne lay awake, listening to the sound of the river passing through the gorge on its way to the Sahara, she was troubled as she had never been troubled before. Her light—not wicked—and fashionable life had always hitherto been governed by caprice, but caprice had led her always down flowery pathways stretching into spaces washed with light, never into the dimness of mystery

or the blackness of sorrow. She had often felt quickly, but never passionately. Wayward she had ever been, but not violent, not really reckless; a creature of fantasy, not a creature of tempest. The song of the boy Arab under the rock by the river—she had been like that; like a winding, fairy tune going out into the sun. Now she was conscious of the further mysteries, that lead some women on to deeds that strike like hammers upon the smooth complacencies of society, she was aware of the beckoning finger that pilots the eager soul whither it should not go, among the great wastes where emotion broods and wonder is alive.

For the first time in her well-filled life she was very consciously in want.

She had been fond of change, but of such consecrated change; the change from Mayfair to Monte Carlo, or from the Scotch moors to the Rue de la Paix. Now, suddenly, this life seemed to her as unreal as a harlequinade in which she had been playing Columbine, and something within her desired a violently different life.

That she could have it was impossible. Therefore she was unhappy. It was a new experience to her to be confronted by that word—impossible. It seemed to insult her. All the flower of her careless contentment with herself, and her life, and the little kingdom she had ruled, shrivelled up. She was the child crying for the moon.

But she was a child who had been offered the moon, who would be offered the moon again. Where, then, was the impossibility she brooded over? It was created by herself and existed within herself. The soul's "I could never do that!" was the fiat that expressed it.

With the sound of the river seemed to come to her faintly the cry of the mad Marabout seeking the murdered dancing-girl in the moonbeams. It was a cry from the savage world on the threshold of which she stood. The man in the scarlet cloak and the man in the bright green robe were the two salient figures in it for her, the one protecting her, the other coming as if to assail her, then falling listlessly from his apparent purpose and capering away intent upon his crazy quest. To-night these two figures seemed more real to her, more vital, than the figure of her husband.

The Spahi had spoken the words "Barbary sheep," with an ironical intonation, and she had read his thought and her mind had echoed it. Yet of "Crumpet's" complete devotion to her she had no doubt. He loved her, he would defend her against the world, he would lie down for her to tread upon, if she desired it, but—he was "poor old Crumpet," a rudimentary man. There was no mystery in him.

She sniffed in the darkness as if inhaling a perfume. She was thinking of the perfume that clung about the folds of the Spahi's cloak. It was like a part of him and of the land he dwelt in. She would have thought a scented Western man effeminate. But this, and many another thing, is readily forgiven to an Oriental. They are "different" from us, these people of the sun. It was this "difference" that had stirred the curiosity and something more of Lady Wyverne. Scent and a baby voice, a revolver ready to protect her, an arm that felt like iron under a scarlet cloak, black eyes that were fierce as a hawk's or velvety with tenderness—she moved uneasily in her bed. She was hot and restless and had no desire for sleep. What was this man? What was his real nature, gentle or barbarous? His manners were perfect, even in their occasional impudence! And his heart? Had he been cruel to women?

She had known all about Crumpet after talking to him for half an hour. She had even read him at a glance, divined exactly his tastes, realised his foibles, summed up his faults and his virtues, "placed" him, in fact. England breeds such men all the time to follow her traditions, to live and to die British to the bone. Crumpet was a thorough Englishman, a right-down good fellow, to be trusted at sight. Well, she had trusted him and married him. And ever since then she had had a good time. And her one aim in life had been just that—to have a good time.

And now? What did she want? How silly and ridiculous and maddening it all was!

Suddenly she got up. Intending only to stay one night at El-Akbara, they had sent on their servants with most of the heavy luggage to Beni-Mora, to engage the best rooms, see to their arrangements, unpack, and have everything ready and charming for their arrival. She had meant to play at roughing it here. Now she looked about for her stockings and slippers by the light of a candle. When at length she had found them, she wrapped herself up in a fur cloak, stepped out on to the veranda, and began to walk up and down. She

passed and repassed Crumpet's window. Once or twice she stopped in front of it, hesitating. She was half inclined to go into his room, to wake him, to tell him that he must think no more of Barbary sheep, but take her away on the morrow to Beni-Mora. Then she walked on again, saying to herself that it would be a shame to wake the tired man who was snoring so rhythmically.

If only Crumpet didn't snore! Lady Wyverne caught herself wondering whether other people—yes, other people—snored.

The moon faded, and the thread of the road beyond the Judas-trees lost its silvery hue and looked grey. The air was colder.

"Barbary sheep," Lady Wyverne murmured to herself.

She stopped again by Crumpet's window, and this time she pushed it back and went into his room, treading softly. A faint light, entering behind her, showed her vaguely the bed and the long body stretched upon it. She touched the body with her little hand.

"Crumpet!"

"Er—a-ah!"

The snore was broken, and from the sleeper's mouth came a heavy, sighing exclamation that sounded like a dull protest drowned in a yawn. Lady Wyverne pushed the body.

"Crumpet!"

"A-ah!"

"It's no use. You've got to wake up!"

Sir Claude shifted round, making the bed creak, heaved himself half up, sank back again, opened his eyes, and stared.

"Is it—a-ah!—is it Achmed?"

"No, it isn't Achmed. Wake up!"

"Who the dev—" He put out his hand and felt her hand, her face. "Kitty! What is it? You're not ill?"

"No."

She sat down on a hard chair by his bed.

"It's only that I can't sleep."

"What's the—a-ah!—what's the time?"

"I don't know. Never mind. I want to talk."

He lay resting on his elbow and staring towards her in the gloom. She thought he looked like a huge ghost.

"What about? I wonder if it'll be a good mornin' for sport?"

"Crumpet, haven't you had enough sport?"

"Enough—how d'you mean?"

"Aren't you tired of killing things?"

She thought she saw an expression of blank surprise come into his face, but she was not quite certain. The gloom prevented her from being certain.

"Tired of killin' things? Why?"

"Wouldn't you rather make things live, things that aren't really alive? Wouldn't you, Crumpet?"

"What d'you mean, Kitty? Make things live! I ain't Providence."

"No, but——"

"Stop a sec——" He laid one hand on her arm. "Isn't that Achmed bringing out the mules? I say, what is the time? We're goin' farther into the mountains to-day."

"Must you go? Must you go so far?"

"Well, Achmed says——"

"I don't want to hear about Achmed. He's a great, ugly, horrid creature."

"Ugly! What's it matter if he's ugly? Why, he's the very deuce for knowin' where the——"

"Don't say Barbary sheep, Crumpet! For mercy's sake, don't say Barbary sheep!"

"Well, but it's Barbary sheep we're goin' after. What's the matter with you, Kitty?"

"I could never explain so that you could understand."

"Ee—ya! Ee—ee—ya!"

There came a cry from below, a stamping of hoofs upon stone. Sir Claude sprang up.

"Jove, it is Achmed! I must get into my togs! I say, Kitty——"

But she had glided away like a shadow and left him.

When he was dressed he came out on to the veranda and found her there, leaning on the parapet and looking over at Achmed and the mules.

"Do go to bed, Kitty," he said.

"What's the good if I can't sleep?"

"But you generally sleep stunnin'ly."

"I know."

"Don't this place suit you?"

He looked at her with a sudden anxiety, but she felt sure the anxiety was for himself.

"Perhaps not," she answered.

"D'you want to get away?"

He gazed at her almost fearfully. "Barbary sheep," she thought, and she laughed bitterly. She read Crumpet's mind with such horrible ease. She saw into him with such precision. And what was there to see? A whole flock of Barbary sheep waiting to be killed.

"Oh, go along, Crumpet!" she said, almost roughly. "Don't stand here asking me questions when you might be killing things. Just think of it, Crumpet! Killing poor, innocent, happy things!"

And she laughed again with an irony that startled him.

"You ain't well, Kitty," he said. "You ain't yourself."

"As if you knew what myself is!"

She threw the words at him savagely. At that moment she was like a little tigress.

He stared; then, as she turned away, he went off muttering to himself: "What the devil's up? What's come to Kitty?" It struck him that she must be getting bored, and he resolved not to stay for a week as he had intended, not to go after gazelle. He even hesitated for a moment when he was in the courtyard, and thought of giving up his expedition, of returning to his wife, of leaving with her that day for Beni-Mora.

But Achmed held the mule for him, with huge, black eyes mutely inviting him to mount. And the thought of the cool air on the mountains, the savagery of the rocky wastes, the sunrise over the distant desert, and the prey—the prey that was so difficult to come at—rose in his mind. He had his imagination of the hunter, though Lady Wyverne did not realise it. And it tempted him, it enticed him, as she was tempted and enticed by the Goblin men of Goblin market, who laid their hands upon her sleeve in the empty hours, and whispered, "Come—come where we will lead you!"

VI

THAT morning, when she came down to breakfast, Lady Wyverne did not see the Spahi. But she had not seen him on the previous morning. She realised that as well as a desert man he was a man of the world. He had lived with French officers and had been to Paris, and knew when to give way to his desire and when to hold back. The good people of the inn, after the table-d'hôte dinner was over, went to their supper, and from their supper straight to their beds, leaving only an Arab to look after the door. Arabs are great gossips. But this Arab would not gossip. The Spahi had taken thought for that. But when the sun was up he was away. Lady Wyverne wondered where.

After breakfast she wandered out through the gorge and the gate of the Sahara, accompanied by a guide from the inn, a slim and sleepy youth, who smiled at her and smoked cigarettes and said little. When they came in sight of the river she heard a piping, and there, under the orange-coloured rock, sat the Arab boy who played the capricious tune. She stopped for a moment to listen to it. She did not know that she was a being made up of caprice, but there was something in the airy music that appealed to her.

"Is he always there playing?" she asked of the guide.

"Always, madame."

"Doesn't he get sick of it?"

"Madame?"

"Doesn't he get bored always sitting in the same place and doing the same thing?"

"I do not know, madame."

It was evident that the guide had no idea what being bored might mean. Lady Wyverne looked at him almost with envy. The hurry and rush of modern life seemed more than strange here, crazy and vulgar. She wondered whether, if she were to remain in this land, she could catch its dreaming silence, could be moulded by its large simplicity into a simpler woman.

"Shall we go to the red village, madame?"

"Which is it? That one on the hill?"

"Yes, madame."

She nodded. The great palm gardens that fringed the river and nestled round the brown earth houses attracted her, held for her a charm. They looked opulent and mysterious, as if strange beings passed strange and wonderful lives among their shadows. She descended with the guide into the green fastnesses of the grove, and the Arab boy's melody died away in the embraces of the sun.

Presently the river made a curve, and she perceived that to gain the red village she must cross it. She glanced about for stepping-stones, but could see none.

"How do we get across?" she asked the Arab.

"I shall carry madame. But we must go a little lower down. The water is deep here."

They went on slowly over the uneven brown earth among the wrinkled trunks. Lady Wyverne looked more closely than before at her attendant. He was quite a boy, with small limbs, delicate hands. She looked at the running water.

"You will never be able to carry me," she said.

"Oh, yes, madame. And if you fall you will not be drowned."

She could not help laughing at his nonchalance, but his answer hardly reassured her.

"Is it much farther—the ford, I mean?" she asked.

"Where that apricot-tree leans over the water, madame."

He pointed. As he did so a figure came out from the recesses of the grove and stood quite still beneath the fruit tree.

"There is Benchaâlal!" said the guide.

"Benchaâlal?"

"The Spahi."

Lady Wyverne shaded her eyes with one hand.

"Who is he?" she asked, carelessly.

But she had recognised the companion of her night walks, and her heart beat perceptibly quicker.

"He is at madame's hotel. Madame has seen him."

"Oh, the officer."

"He is terrible. He is the best horseman of the Sahara. With the revolver he can hit any stone I throw up into the air—so!"

He flung a stone up towards the quivering blue of the sky.

"All women who see him love him. In Algiers they die for him, and in the desert, where he returns to his father's house, they will cry out thus from morning until evening."

He broke into a high twittering like a bird. The man under the apricot-tree turned round and looked towards them.

"Hush!" said Lady Wyverne.

But the boy did not heed her. Delighted with the success of his female impersonation, he twittered more shrilly than before. The Spahi came to meet them. When he was close to them he lifted his hand to his turban and saluted gravely.

"I believe I have had the honour of seeing madame at the hotel?" he said, almost as if interrogatively. "Madame is going to cross the river?"

Lady Wyverne hesitated. She knew, of course, that the Spahi was going to carry her over. She saw his intention in his long and subtle eyes. She wished him to carry her. She even longed ridiculously to be carried by him. But she hesitated, because she was now fully aware that there was within her something that was more than wilful, something that was only kept back from running wild by—a what? A thin thread of resolution that might be snapped in a moment, or even brushed aside. And she feared that the touch of the Spahi, like the hand of the East laid upon her, might snap, or brush aside that barrier, might send her unfettered, unrestrained, into a terrible world of light.

But while Lady Wyverne hesitated the guide spoke.

"I am going to carry madame across."

The Spahi laughed. His little, even teeth gleamed between his dark lips.

"Madame permits me?"

He took Lady Wyverne up in his arms.

"No!" she said.

He looked into her face. As he did so he made a secret sign to the guide to pull off his gaiters and boots. The boy bent down to do so, swiftly, deftly.

"Why not? It is only a moment."

He balanced himself on one foot. The first gaiter and boot were off.

She was quite still in his arms. She felt as if he could hold her for ever without fatigue.

"I don't want to go."

"But you were going. Are you afraid of the water?"

"No."

"Are you afraid of me?"

He balanced himself on the other foot. The second gaiter and boot were off, and the Spahi's bare, brown feet clung to the hot stones as if they loved them.

"Yes," she said.

She did not know why she said it. Certainly she did not say it merely because it was true.

"I will teach you not to be afraid," he murmured.

And he stepped into the water.

Lady Wyverne shut her eyes because, since the thing was to be, she desired to feel, to realise it to the utmost. When the Spahi put her down on the opposite shore she sighed, almost like a child. She opened her eyes and they rested upon the Spahi's bare feet.

The foot of the desert man is as expressive as his hand, and often as fine, as delicate. These feet gave to Lady Wyverne an extraordinary impression of finesse, which almost made her think of herself as clumsy. She contrasted swiftly this vital impression of finesse with the equally vital impression of

strength of which she had just been conscious, and she wondered at the extremes that were mingled in this man, at the woman that was surely in him as well as the man and the savage man. Suddenly giving the rein to her impulse, she said:

"Have you your revolver?"

He drew it instantly from the folds of his scented garments.

"Throw up a stone," she said to the guide who had just come up to them, holding the boots and gaiters of the Spahi in his hand.

The boy went away a few steps, stood in front of the Spahi, looked at him, bent down and picked up a stone. The Spahi smiled and lifted the hand that held the revolver. He cried out a word in Arabic. The boy flung the stone high into the blue. There was a sharp report, and it fell in splinters and was hidden by the water of the river.

"Crumpet couldn't do that!"

"Madame?"

The exclamation had come involuntarily from Lady Wyverne's lips.

"Crompètes—vous dites?"

"Au revoir, monsieur, and many thanks."

She suddenly realised that she was losing her head, turned quickly away, and began to walk towards the village. The Spahi did not attempt to follow her. But he detained the guide for a moment, and spoke rapidly to him in Arabic.

That afternoon at four Lady Wyverne was on the veranda waiting for her husband. The wicker tea-table was beside her. She looked across the court between the Judas-trees to the dusty road, and listened for the sound of mules' tripping feet. But she did not hear them. The time passed on. Crumpet was later than usual. At last she was tired of waiting and called over the balustrade to the Arab below to bring up tea. Just as it was being brought there came along the road an Arab boy with a piece of paper in his hand. He turned in through the gateway, looked up to Lady Wyverne, and held up the paper.

"Is it for me?" she asked.

He nodded. She beckoned to him to come, and in a moment he was beside her and had given her the note. It was from Sir Claude.

Darling Old Girl,—D'you mind very much if I don't come back to-night? I've got two sheep this morning, and Achmed says if I stay out and sleep at—some place near a salt mountain with the devil's own name—I can be certain of potting some gazelle at sundown. Back to-morrow without fail, and ready to move on to Beni—what you may call it. Love CRUMPET.

Lady Wyverne gave the boy a coin and sat down alone to tea.

"Why did Providence give me a fool for a husband?"

That was her thought.

As she sipped her tea she seemed to see the Spahi's brown feet resting on the warm stones by the river. They clung to the stones as sensitively as hands could have clung. She imagined them paddling softly over the desert sands.

And a woman's feet trod beside them.

VII

THE place with the devil's own name alluded to by Sir Claude was El-Alia in the plain at the foot of the salt mountain, which travellers see from the train as they journey to Beni-Mora. That evening, as darkness was closing in, Sir Claude, weary with a long day's hunting, but triumphant in the knowledge of slaughtered Barbary sheep and gazelle, was seated under a vine before the door of an *auberge* kept by an elderly Frenchwoman, discussing with a voracious appetite an excellent meal of gazelle, with vegetables, a chicken, a cous-cous, and a salad, washed down by a bottle of thin red wine, which he would have despised in London, but which now seemed to him more delicious than a vintage claret drunk under ordinary town circumstances. The two days of outdoor life in wild surroundings and glorious air, the contact with Africans, who were mighty hunters, his prowess in killing things—as Lady Wyverne described sport—had given an edge to his spirit as well as to his appetite. He felt in glorious condition, at peace with himself and all the world. The only cloud to dim his immense satisfaction was the thought of his promise to Kitty to go away on the morrow. Beni-Mora was far less good as a sporting centre than El-Akbara. He would have liked to spend another week or, better, another month, at the cosy little hotel in the gorge. Only Kitty was bored. She had showed it. She had asked him to take her away. Vaguely he remembered their interview in the night. He had been half asleep at first, and afterwards pre-occupied by the thought that Achmed was bringing round the mules. Nevertheless.

he remembered Kitty's odd, nervous anxiety, the unusual irony and bitterness of her speech.

" P'r'aps she thinks I'm neglectin' her," he thought, as he refilled his glass. " Women never understand what sport is to a man, unless they shoot themselves. And Kitty hates a gun."

That she liked a revolver he did not know.

He put down his glass and turned in his chair, looking towards the open door of the *auberge*.

" Café ! " he shouted.

" Voilá ! " shrieked a voice from within.

Sir Claude smiled and drew forth his cigar-case, at the same time stretching out his long legs with an audible grunt of satisfaction.

Achmed had gone off to eat and chatter with friends in the village, which lay hidden among palms a few hundred yards from the *auberge*, and the coffee was brought out by the landlady, who set it on the table and then asked monsieur if he had enjoyed his dinner.

Sir Claude felt expansive, and his reply brought joy to his cook's heart. For landlady and cook were both represented by the stout woman with the grey hair, the wrinkled cheeks and the blue apron who stood before him, watching him with shrewd curiosity in her dark-grey eyes.

" Sit down, madame," said Sir Claude, genially, in his English public-school French. " Sit down and take a glass of cognac."

The landlady obeyed, smiling meanwhile and smoothing her apron. She admired a fine man, and she considered Sir Claude an exceedingly handsome specimen of humanity.

" What brought you to this out-of-the-way place ? " continued Sir Claude.

The landlady sipped her cognac with an " A votre santé, m'sieu ! " and proceeded to relate her history, or that part of it which she thought edifying—how she had been born at Marseilles and brought to Algiers by her parents ; how she had married a waiter in a café who had taken to drink and at last lived only for absinthe ; how they had drifted from one place to another and finally settled at El-Alia, where he had died three years before.

" And you live alone here among the Arabs ? " cried Sir Claude.

" No, m'sieu, I have my nephew, Robert. But to-night he is at Beni-Mora. He has gone to buy provisions. All our tinned food comes from there."

She sipped again with her eyes on Sir Claude. The shadows beneath the vine grew deeper. The pale salt mountain was fading away like a ghost in the night. Over the wide and lonely land the desert wind came sighing, bringing a vital, an almost stinging freshness of the wastes. Sir Claude gazed out across the plain, then at the grey-haired Frenchwoman with her little liqueur-glass in her fingers.

" Even so, it's a solitary life, madame," he said. " But I suppose you make friends with the Arabs ? "

The landlady curled her lips, and an almost malignant, catlike look came into her face.

" Oh, la, la ! The Arabs ! " she exclaimed. " The Arab is traître, m'sieu. Every Arab that was ever born is traître. You may take my word for it. I have lived among them nearly all my life. Never trust an Arab. He will live with you for twenty years and then cut your throat for a sou. What I have seen ! What I have known among the Arabs ! They are clever, but yes ! They are handsome. They can get round a man, and as for women—well ! " She spread out her hands and shrugged her shoulders. " I myself when I was younger—but enough ! The Arab is traître, m'sieu. He will sell his soul for money, and to satisfy his lust he will lie, he will cajole, he will bribe, he will betray, he will murder. I could tell you stories ! And an Arab is always an Arab. He never changes. He seems to change—yes, but it is only the surface. The bottom is always the same. He goes to Paris. He speaks French as I do. He learns the lovely manners of the Parisian. Mon Dieu ! He might go to a court if we had one in my beautiful France. And then he comes back to the desert and at once all is forgotten. He sits in the sand, he spits, he eats cous-cous with his fingers—he is a camel, m'sieu, he is a camel. Such is the Arab ! Beware of him ! Has m'sieu a wife ? "

The abrupt question startled Sir Claude, who had been listening to this tirade with a good deal of astonishment.

" Er—yes," he replied uneasily.

" Never let her have anything to do with the Arabs ! "

" Good Lord, madame ! As if my wife would——"

" Never, never ! " continued the landlady,

vehemently. "The Arab has a charm for women. I myself have felt it, I who speak to you! He calls and they come. I could tell you of European ladies—but enough! The desert holds its mysteries. I remember Benchaâlal, the Spahi, the son of Mohammed Ali, he who came from the Zibans and is now an officer in Algiers. The stories he has told me of his doings! The things he has related to me of the French ladies——"

"The Spahi!" said Sir Claude, more uneasily. "What did you say his name was?"

"Benchaâlal, m'sieu, son of Mohammed Ali, the great Caïd. He is beautiful. One cannot deny it. He speaks French perfectly. He shoots—ah, no Frenchman can shoot like him! He is strong. I have seen him take up a walnut and crack it in his fingers."

"The devil!"

"M'sieu?"

"Nothin'. Go on, madame, go on!"

Sir Claude had sat up, and was now leaning forward in his chair with his eyes fixed upon his garrulous companion. The darkness took the wide spaces of the land, and the night wind came again over the immense flats, and made the dry and dusty leaves of the vine rustle above their heads.

"But he is the most traître of all the Arabs, and he loves to tell of his villainies. When he goes to the desert to visit his father, he always passes by here. Sometimes he stays for a day or two and goes out after gazelle. And at night he sits here under the vine with me, m'sieu, as you are doing now, and he talks. Ah, he is cruel, and yet——"

Again she spread out her hands and blew forth a sigh to join the wind among the vine-leaves.

"One must look at him. One must listen to him. M'sieu, I dare say the devil, if he came out of the desert, if he sat here, I dare say the devil would charm a woman. Who knows?"

"You say he can crack a walnut with his fingers?"

"But yes, m'sieu. And yet his hands are slim as a woman's. Tiens! He should be passing here in a day or two. They tell me he is en congé."

"Who told you so?"

"Do I remember? These things go from mouth to mouth in the desert as quickly as fire from straw to straw. We have news in the desert, I can tell you. It is getting dark. Shall I fetch the lamp out here for m'sieu?"

"Yes, fetch the lamp, madame."

The landlady got up and went quickly in through the door, her grey dress wagging from her broad hips. When she had gone Sir Claude got up, too, and went to the entrance of the arbour. He could no longer see the salt mountain. It was a dark night, for the moon had not yet risen. Presently it would come and bathe this lonely world in light. Meanwhile he wanted the lamp. The darkness added to a strange apprehension which had been brought to him by the landlady's gossip. As he stood staring vaguely before him towards the desert, he remembered his first evening in the inn at El-Akbara. He had got up from the dining-table to go to bed and had heard a sharp little sound in the room. He seemed to hear it now, to see the Spahi delicately extracting the kernel from the nut-shell. Even then he had been conscious of a faint and creeping uneasiness, of a hesitation which he had not understood. The Spahi was certainly this Benchaâlal. Of that he was convinced.

Well, and what if he was?

Sir Claude was not a very imaginative man, but he was not totally devoid of imagination. He was, as has been said, by nature somewhat cautious and sceptical, as Lady Wyverne was incautious and inclined to superstition and credulity. But he had never doubted his wife. He loved her, but even if he had not, the mere fact that she was his wife would probably have preserved her from any suspicion on his part. Yet he had lived in the London world from time to time and knew what went on sometimes there. He had heard certain husbands laughed at, or sneered at in the clubs, and had seen them welcomed immediately afterwards by the laughers and the sneerers with open hands and hearts. He had known charming women to do things that were not charming—to use no stronger phrase.

What had been the matter with Kitty that morning?

The landlady came back with a lamp which she set down on the table. But now Sir Claude felt restless, as if he could not return to his chair.

"I wonder where Achmed is," he said.

"In the village, m'sieu. Ah, Achmed—he is another of them!"

"Achmed?"

"But yes, m'sieu. The things he has done, the things he will do for a few francs! You would not believe them if I told you."

"Is he—is Achmed a friend of this Spahi?"

"Of Benchaâlal? A friend I would not say. Benchaâlal is proud. And since he has been in Paris—ah, he does not speak with every one, not he!"

"But he knows Achmed?"

"And should he not know him, m'sieu? Why——"

But Sir Claude interrupted the good woman abruptly.

"Tell me," he said, "are you quite sure that Ben—what is it?"

"Benchaâlal, m'sieu."

"That Benchaâlal has not passed by here without stoppin'?"

"He has not passed, m'sieu. If he had I should know it. They would have seen him at the station."

"And you know he is en congé?"

"M'sieu, he is. He should have come by yesterday at latest, if not the day before. But perhaps he is at El-Akbara, where m'sieu is staying. I asked Achmed."

"What did he say?"

"He said no. But what does that mean? Achmed is an Arab, and an Arab never tells the truth."

"Well, au revoir, madame."

"M'sieu is going to bed already? And just as I have brought the lamp!"

"No, I am going for a stroll to the village. Leave the lamp. I shall soon be back to drink another bottle of wine."

"M'sieu is too good. But is m'sieu armed? It is not safe to wander at night without arms."

Grimly Sir Claude looked at her, pulling out of one of his pockets the muzzle of a revolver.

"It's all right, madame."

"Bien! Bien! Au revoir, m'sieu."

"Au revoir, madame."

He walked away in the darkness. The landlady stood under the vine looking after him.

"What has he?" she said to herself.

She had noticed that a change had come over her guest while she had been talking, that his air of calm satisfaction, peculiar to the successful hunter full fed after a long day's sport, had given place to a moody anxiety, a restlessness that betokened an altered mood.

"What has he, this monsieur?" she repeated to herself.

The wind from the desert blew more strongly among the vine leaves above her head, and the lamp flame flickered uneasily.

Behind the salt mountain there grew slowly a pale light that heralded the coming of the moon.

VIII

SIR CLAUDE walked through the darkness towards the village. As he went, treading softly on the dry and sandy road, he thought of the prophecy of the astrologer in Paris, he seemed to see the thin red lines of meticulous writing:

"Danger d'une grande perte—la plus grande perte possible."

And then he thought of the young Spahi, sitting by the small table in the hotel dining-room, and smiling gently as he cracked the walnut with his fingers and drew out the kernel that nestled within. And then he thought of Achmed.

Achmed was a mighty hunter, and had won Sir Claude's enthusiastic admiration. Tall, lithe, one-eyed, with long, yellow teeth shaded by a thin, wiry, black moustache, he was not beautiful to look upon. But he knew his business and took a pleasure in it. He had been eager for these sporting expeditions. Perhaps he had been too eager.

The landlady of the *auberge* had an influence. She had infected Sir Claude with her own distrust of these desert men. Of his wife he was thinking now, with the anxious, protective sentiment of the strong, loving man; of himself with an angry bitterness. How could he have left her alone, without even her maid, in an inn lost in the wilderness, while he was gratifying his selfish lust for sport? The loneliness of the desert around him, the darkness, the keen wind against his brown cheeks roused in him a sort of fury against himself. The cosy little hostelry in the gorge presented itself to his imagination as a cut-throat, desolate shanty. And there, among wild, treacherous people who would slit any one's throat for a few sous, he had left the whimsical, fair-haired little creature he adored to face the night alone.

He hurried on. And again he thought of Achmed and of the Spahi, connecting them together in his mind.

Achmed had been very eager for him to stay at El-Akbara, had urged him repeatedly to remain for a long time, had painted in glowing colours the wonders of the region, and had spoken of Beni-Mora as a place for invalids and old women, intolerable to men. He had read at a glance, Arab fashion, the character of Sir Claude, and had played upon it with a subtle cunning. Had he not? But all this might have been merely in order that the guide might pocket Sir Claude's money. That would be reason enough for his persuasion.

"P'r'aps it's all rot!" said Sir Claude to himself, resorting to his favourite phrase.

Nevertheless, he hurried on till he came to the first earth houses of the village. Their doors of palm were shut. Here and there, above these shut doors, the skulls of camels grinned. Through the eye-sockets strings of red pepper were hung. Upon the flat roofs lean white, or yellow, dogs ran to and fro, bending down their heads and barking furiously at the stranger as he passed.

Again Sir Claude was conscious of the savagery of this land, and was stabbed by remorse for his selfish carelessness. Like many men who are not clever, he was inclined either to minimise or to exaggerate things. He had thought nothing of leaving his wife alone for a night. Now he thought too much of it. It seemed to him a monstrous dereliction of duty.

A shadow stole out from among the blind and shadowy houses and padded softly after him on bare feet. He turned sharply, his hand on his revolver.

"What do you want?" he said, in French.

The shadow stopped and gazed at him steadily, with glittering eyes above which a hood was drawn forward hiding the head.

Sir Claude repeated his question, but got no answer.

"Here, you come along with me!" he exclaimed. "I won't have you behind."

He made an explanatory gesture. The shadow understood it and quietly obeyed. Evidently comprehending why the stranger was there, it guided him down a narrow alley, across a runlet of water, and into an open space, a sort of Arab *place*, or piazza, on the further side of which lights shone from a native café maure. Here, squatting upon the floor, among a crowd of hooded men, was Achmed with a coffee-cup beside him, intent on playing draughts.

When he saw his master, he instantly rose with a smile, pushed his companions away without ceremony, and invited Sir Claude to come in and sit down on an earthen divan. But Sir Claude had no mind for pleasure.

"Come out, Achmed!" he said, standing rigid in the low doorway. "I want to speak to you."

Achmed seriously saluted his friends, swung a fold of his burnous over his left shoulder, picked out his pair of yellow slippers from a medley against the wall, and gently stepped across to Sir Claude and followed him out into the night.

The shadow glided after them.

"Here, I say," said Sir Claude, irritably, "get rid of this fellow. Give him somethin'—this." He held out a franc. "And tell him to be off."

Achmed obeyed, and the shadow evaporated into the darkness.

When they were alone, walking back towards the *auberge*, Sir Claude began:

"How long would it take to get back to El-Akbara?"

"El-Akbara, m'sieu! But it is impossible."

"Answer my question. How long would it take?"

"If we start early to-morrow, m'sieu, at sunrise——"

"I don't mean to-morrow, I mean to-night."

"I do not know, m'sieu. One does not make such a journey at night in the desert with a stranger."

"With a stranger? What difference does that make?"

"A rich stranger would not be safe at night in the desert. I am poor. I have nothing—nothing." He flung out his arms in a large, despairing gesture, keeping his one eye fixed steadily on Sir Claude. "Therefore, I can go where I will. If m'sieu wishes me to return to-night to El-Akbara, to take a message to madame, I will go, though the mules are tired. But if monsieur asks me to accompany him, I dare not. For if an evil chance came to m'sieu in my company, no rich stranger would take me as guide any more. I should be ruined. I should fall into the misery."

Sir Claude was silent for a moment. The guide's assertions seemed reasonable. But Sir Claude remembered the landlady's words, that Achmed would do anything for a few francs.

"And what if I paid you well?" he

said. "What if I gave you a hundred francs?"

"M'sieu says——?"

"Suppose I gave you a hundred francs to come with me now, to-night, back to El-Akbara! Wouldn't you come?"

"M'sieu, I dare not be responsible. If any harm——"

"What—has Benchaâlal paid you more, then?" exclaimed Sir Claude.

He scarcely knew why he said it, why the ugly, the hideous surmise abruptly started into his mind. Indeed, it was only a wild guess that he was making, moved by something uneasy in Achmed's obstinacy, something that suddenly suggested to Sir Claude that the Arab was balancing two offers, or was comparing the merits of two clients—testing, as it were, the capacities of their respective purses. Sir Claude did not often show intuition, but to-night there was unusual tension on his nerves. Something in his heart seemed to play upon his intellect, to wake it up into a quickness that was not normal.

"Benchaâlal, m'sieu?" said Achmed. "Who is that?"

"You damned, deceitful rascal, you know well enough! Benchaâlal, the Spahi, the officer from Algiers, who is stayin' at the inn at El-Akbara."

Convicted of deception, Achmed, with perfect composure, left that question and enquired:

"And why should Benchaâlal give me money?"

Sir Claude opened his lips to answer, but he said nothing. What could he say to a low-born Arab? Even if his wild surmise were true—and why should it be true?—he could not express it, could not even hint at it. The landlady of the inn had roused in him fear and suspicion and condemnation; fear for his wife, suspicion of all Arabs, especially of Benchaâlal and of Achmed, condemnation of himself. But he must keep silence. Yet the complete composure of Achmed did not allay but added to his mistrust. He felt positive that he had been persuaded to these long sporting expeditions, to this night away from El-Akbara, for reasons quite unconnected with gazelle and Barbary sheep.

They had come out of the village now, and were in the desert close to the *auberge*. The moon was just showing its edge above the cone of the salt mountain and lifting the blackness from the waste. Under the vine the little light of the lamp shone, showing the immobile figure of the old Frenchwoman watching for their return.

Sir Claude made no reply to Achmed's question, but when he reached the *auberge* he suddenly said to Achmed:

"Now, you just tell madame and me why you said to madame that Benchaâlal was not stayin' at El-Akbara!"

"M'sieu, I did not say so! How could I when Benchaâlal is there?"

Sir Claude turned to the landlady, who was looking surprised and very curious.

"Didn't you assure me, madame——" he began.

But the landlady interrupted him.

"M'sieu may talk all night, and all the nights of the year, but he will never have reason of an Arab."

She spread out her hands and shrugged her shoulders.

"C'est une sale race!" she whispered into Sir Claude's ear.

He stood for a moment staring at the sand, his hands in his pockets. The moonlight grew. Its light decided him. He lifted up his head with a jerk of his chin.

"Go and get the mules!" he said to Achmed. "Go!"

The guide stared at him for a minute, then evidently realised that there was no appeal from that command, and disappeared through the doorway of the *auberge* to the inner court, where the beasts were stabled.

The landlady looked amazed.

"M'sieu is not going? But it is not possible! M'sieu——"

"Look here, madame," said Sir Claude, sitting down by the little table, on which, by the lamp, was already set the bottle of wine which he had promised to drink when he returned from the village. "Look here—you've been tellin' me about the Arabs! I don't know them. I'm a stranger here. I come from England, where you can take a man's word, and trust your womenkind pretty nearly anywhere without being afraid of their bein' insulted. Now you tell me! Sit down, madame!"

The landlady sat down opposite to him. The flickering light from the lamp fell across her wrinkled, intelligent face, and brightened the eyes which were fixed intently upon her guest.

"And you tell me! I've got a wife, madame, a little thing, young, a girl almost she is, and about the prettiest woman in England. I've got her out here in Africa."

"Where is she, m'sieu?"

"At the inn at El-Akbara. This chap, this Benchaâlal, is there. I've seen him. I saw the damned fellow the first night we got there. Now, what should he be stayin' on day after day for, instead of goin' to his home, to his damned mud hut in the desert? And why should Achmed deny to you that he was there, and pretend to me that he had never heard of him, till I showed that I knew? And why should Achmed get me away from the inn every day, and persuade me to-night to be here, leavin' my wife alone among a lot of scoundrels? Don't you think there's somethin' up, madame? Don't you think, if you were me, you'd get back to your wife—yes, get back to her even if the mules hadn't six legs to go upon between them?"

He struck his big hand upon the table and made the bottle jump and the lamp sway and shiver. The landlady pursed her lips, put up the middle finger of her right hand to her chin and took it away again.

"So," she said, after a pause. "So Benchaâlal is at El-Akbara! I thought as much."

"Why?" said Sir Claude sharply.

Everything made him uneasy and suspicious to-night.

"Something in Achmed's manner when I asked him and he denied it. And yet he lies well, like all the Arabs. But there was a something, Sidi. He didn't want to talk of Benchaâlal."

Sir Claude leaned over the table towards her.

"You think there's somethin' up?"

"M'sieu, how can I know? But one think I know is this—if I had a wife, and she was pretty and young, I would not leave her alone with Benchaâlal near her, no, not for five minutes."

Sir Claude got up and turned towards the doorway.

"Achmed!" he roared. "Venez! Dépèchez vous!"

"Violá! Violá!" called a voice in the distance.

"Mind you, madame," said Sir Claude, turning again to the landlady. "My wife would as soon think of tryin' to fly as of havin' anything to do with one of these damned blacks. As a friend, I mean—as a guide, of course! What are you smilin' at!"

"Nothing, m'sieu. I was not smiling. M'sieu was deceived by the lamplight. There's a wind getting up."

She moved the lamp and placed it so that her face was in shadow. Sir Claude grunted. He felt sure he had seen an ugly smile cross the woman's face, and suddenly he regretted that he had established a sort of intimacy with this stranger. He had been too impulsive. But she was a European and a woman, and then it was from her that all these suspicions had come to knock upon the door of his mind.

"Kindly give me the bill, madame," he said, stiffly. "And put down that bottle of wine and the room for the night. I'll pay, of course, as if I stayed."

"M'sieu is too good."

She went softly indoors. And as soon as her back was turned she smiled again to herself.

"Mon Dieu!" she thought. "These men! These men with the prettiest wives in the world! What babies they are! What babies! Que diable!"

She sat down by the light of a tallow candle at her greasy table, and made out a good, stiff bill for the baby to pay.

Achmed was a long time getting the mules, but at last he was ready, the account was settled and Sir Claude was in the saddle, his gun slung beside him and his revolver ready to his hand.

"Bon soir, madame," he said gruffly.

"Bon soir, m'sieur. Bon voyage."

He rode away into the desert. Achmed prepared to follow, mounted on the second mule, and leading a third which carried the dead gazelle and the Barbary sheep.

"Bon soir, Monsieur Achmed!" said the landlady, with an ironical emphasis on the "Monsieur." "Bon voyage."

The guide turned his eye upon her.

"Cochon femme!" he hissed at her. "Chamelle! chamelle!"

He spat at her, kicked the mule furiously with his heels, and cantered away.

"Sale race!" ejaculated the landlady.

She blew out the lamp, picked up the full wine bottle, tucked it under her arm, turned and went into the *auberge*, closing the door behind her.

A moment later there was a clang of the great bar of palm-wood falling into its iron socket.

IX

THAT was a long and weary journey by the light of the moon. At first Sir Claude kept in front, but presently he got

off the track, and Achmed was obliged to ride up and go ahead to show the way. He passed Sir Claude morosely, without looking at him, and took the lead. On and on they went, always towards the dark range of mountains that showed where the desert ended. Sir Claude kept his eyes fixed upon it. The mules went slowly. Poor beasts, they were really tired and needed a night's rest. Like most Englishmen, Sir Claude was solicitous for all animals that did him service, and more than once his conscience pricked him as he encouraged his mule with voice and hand. Achmed did not care. The mules were not his, and no thought of an animal's suffering pained his imagination.

Presently he began to sing in a whining, plaintive voice. His sulkiness was subsiding as his active, greedy mind began to work, helped by the monotonous motion across the plain. The stranger, the rich Englishman, had offered him one hundred francs to do the very thing he was now doing. And he had refused them. But he had refused them because he had also refused to make this moonlight flitting. Well, but now he was making it.

" Khali Targa ! Khali Targa !
Give me the scorpion that I may eat !
See I am kneeling at thy feet.
To the sand, to the sand I have bowed my head,
In the fire have I stood, in the fire that is red.
Khali Targa ! Khali Targa ! "

Was he making it for nothing ? This thought disgusted him. While he sang he was planning a campaign, and in the planning his fury was evaporating.

" Khali Targa ! Khali Targa !
Give me the glass that I may eat !
See I am crouching at thy feet.
In my belly the living scorpion lies,
In my heart the fierce lust for paradise—
Khali Targa ! Khali Targa ! "

Never yet had Achmed been " bested " by a Roumi. The mere thought of such a catastrophe stirred all his faculties. Since he had been obliged to undertake this journey he must be well paid for it. The Roumi should be his prey, the Roumi who had miscalled him, who had forced him to play false to one of his own creed, to one of his own people.

" Khali Targa ! Khali Targa !
Give me the knife that my flesh desires,
As it longed for the licking tongues of the fires.
The glass with the scorpion has gone to rest ;
Give the curving knife to my naked breast.
Khali Targa ! Khali Targa ! "

" Achmed ! "

Sir Claude's voice shouted from behind. Achmed stopped his singing and turned half round upon his mule.

" Sidi ? " he said, politely.

" If you don't want to drive me mad, stop that cursed whinin' ! "

" As m'sieu wishes ! "

He pulled in his mule and Sir Claude came up with him.

" What the devil were you singin' about?"

" M'sieur, I was singing the song of the Aïssaoui, they who stand in the fire and eat scorpions and glass, and drive in the steel behind their eyes, and are carried with their naked breasts upon sharp knives."

Sir Claude twisted his body in a sort of heavy shudder.

" Cheerful ! " he ejaculated. " How long shall we be ? "

" M'sieu, I cannot tell. The mules are weary. This is a cruel journey."

He sighed, keenly regarding Sir Claude with his one eye.

" Never before, after hunting all the day, have I been made to travel all the night."

Sir Claude's mule stumbled.

" Hold up ! " he cried, in English.

He felt a certain compunction.

" It's your own fault ! " he growled.

" My fault, m'sieu ? "

Achmed's voice quivered with innocent astonishment.

" Well, if it isn't——"

Sir Claude broke off. After all, he did not know anything. He was only suspicious. And it seemed to him impossible either to confirm or to destroy his suspicions at present. For how could he question Achmed without showing that he was anxious for his wife's safety ? And how could he let a " damned black " know that he had ever, in his thoughts, connected her beauty and purity with the desires of a Spahi ?

" You shouldn't have put me up to this expedition," he said.

" I thought m'sieu had never shot gazelle."

" No more I had. And what of that ? "

" All the Englishmen who come to El-Akbara want to shoot gazelle."

Sir Claude began to wonder whether he had wronged the guide. Now that the old Frenchwoman's influence was removed, he felt less suspicious. It was she who had alarmed him by her diatribes against the Arabs. Perhaps she was a silly old woman, an alarmist, even a liar. But then Achmed had lied about this Benchaâlal.

"M'sieu promised me——"

It was Achmed's voice with its most insinuating intonation.

"Eh!"

"M'sieu promised me a hundred francs if I protected him through the night to El-Akbara."

"Protected!"

Sir Claude laughed.

"Showed me the way, you mean."

"As m'sieu chooses. M'sieu will keep his word?"

"Well, of all the cheek!"

Sir Claude had dropped into English.

"M'sieu says 'of course.' He is right. All the English keep their promises. They are a great nation."

"I never promised you a hundred francs, but——"

"Yes, m'sieu?"

"No. I can't bribe the feller!" Sir Claude thought. But then again came to him the fierce desire to know whether Achmed and this Spahi, this Benchaâlal, had plotted together to get him out of the way.

"Two hundred francs would be nothin' to me if I got hold of a devoted fellow, of a fellow who'd never tell me a lie or play me a dirty trick," he said, almost against his will.

Achmed's eyes brightened. The flame of avarice shot up in it. But he was subtle, and only replied carelessly:

"The good master makes the good servant."

"And Benchaâlal? Is he a good master?" asked Sir Claude.

"M'sieu, Benchaâlal is generous to those who serve him—they say."

"And to you? Is he generous to you?"

"M'sieu, I am not the servant of Benchaâlal."

"What? Have you never gone huntin' with him?"

"Oh, yes, m'sieu. And when Benchaâlal hunts he pays well. But he pays afterwards."

There was—or so Sir Claude thought—a strong significance in Achmed's voice as he said the last words. His blood grew hot. He longed to strike the guide, to knock him off his mule with a straight blow from the shoulder and to see him roll over in the sand.

"No," he thought to himself, "I'm damned if I can have anythin' to do with the feller. I'll shift for myself. To-morrow I'll take Kitty away to Beni-Mora. She'll be glad to go. She wanted to go before. I've been a selfish beast, but there can't be any harm done, even if that beastly black has been up to some devilry with Achmed."

And Achmed could get nothing more out of him. To all the Arab's insinuating remarks he returned gruff monosyllabic replies, and at last they rode on hour after hour, in complete silence, coming even nearer to the black wall of mountains that was their destination.

It was towards dawn when the mules set their feet upon the firm, well-made road that leads to the three villages of the oasis of El-Akbara. The moon was waning, the wind at their backs was colder, and Sir Claude, strong though he was, felt an unusual sense of fatigue laying hold of him, an unusual depression, no doubt purely physical, stealing upon his spirit, almost like a stealthy tide, frigid and sadly murmuring.

"It's a devil of a ride," he said to himself.

Then he tried to pull himself together, staring towards the rocky ramparts now close at hand, and fixing his thoughts on the cosy inn, the comfortable bed, the long sleep that awaited him. And then Kitty! Soon he would see her. He pictured himself stealing into her room, shading the candle with his hand, and looking down on her slight form, her pretty, fair head with the yellow hair spread out over the pillow.

He bent his long legs backward and struck his tired mule with his heels. The poor brute whose tripping walk had long since degenerated into an uneasy shamble, started forward in a sort of convulsive canter, and passed Achmed, who was hunched up and seemed to have fallen asleep shrouded in his burnous with the hood drawn closely round his face. But the canter only lasted a moment. The animal was nearly dead beat, like its rider, and subsided almost at once into its former tragic pace.

As Sir Claude passed him, Achmed's one eye peered sharply forth from the shadow of the hood, and when his master's mule ceased from cantering, the guide sat up on his pack-saddle and threw off his elaborate pretence of sleep. He had a knife hidden under his burnous and now he laid his hand upon it, looking steadily at the hind legs of the mule in front. He wanted to get into El-Akbara before Sir Claude, and he was considering how to accomplish

this without waking suspicion in the Roumi. The failure of his attempt to wheedle his employer into parting with the hundred francs he longed for irritated him, almost infuriated him. He knew that he would not get the money, and he hated Sir Claude as an Arab hates the man always who baffles his greed. Presently he drew his knife from its sheath of goat-skin, slipped softly from his mule, and stealthily approaching Sir Claude's, keeping his eye fixed warily on its rider. He did not act at once, but walked for two or three minutes noiselessly as a ghost at the rail of the mule, till he felt certain that he could do his deed unobserved. Then he bent down, still keeping up with the beast, the hand with the knife in it hung for a second above the shambling, hairy legs, came nearer to them, came close to them.

"Achmed!"

Sir Claude had turned.

'Achmed! What the devil——?"

"Stop, m'sieu! There is a stone in his hoof. Let me get it out."

Sir Claude pulled up startled. Instantly the Arab lifted one of the mule's hoofs from the road and with the knife pretended to extract a stone, holding one, snatched from the road, up a second later, then flinging it away.

"I saw he was going lame, m'sieu. C'est ça!"

Calmly he returned his knife to its sheath.

"I didn't notice anythin'."

Sir Claude was looking at him with keen suspicion.

"M'sieu, I was behind. I could see."

"I thought you were asleep."

"The Arab does not sleep when he is protecting his master."

Sir Claude grunted.

"Now you get in front again."

"As m'sieu pleases."

Achmed jumped again on to his mule, and began to lead the way once more, letting the led mule run free with its load of gazelle and Barbary sheep.

Foiled in his attempt to lame Sir Claude's beast, and get away before Sir Claude had time to notice the accident and call him back, he urged his mule on as fast as possible, and again began to sing at the top of his voice.

"Khali Targa! Khali Targa!
On the curving edge of the steel I have lain,
I have feared not the touch of the flickering pain;
Nor the sharp-toothed glass, nor the poisoned sting——
Now the lash, the lash to my bared loins bring!
Khali Targa! Khali Targa!"

This time Sir Claude did not interrupt him. For the three villages were at hand, houses, of shadow kept by trees of shadow, the river, flowing out by the gorge into the desert, lifted its murmur to their ears, the journey neared its end. And does not the weary traveller, as he rides in from the darkness of the waste, instinctively raise his voice in a song, or in a cry to hail the friends, the joys that await him?

Louder and louder Achmed sang. His "Khali Targa!" went out to the frowning masses of the towering rocks and was echoed back by them. It came from the desert as a shout of warning to two night wanderers who, close to the place where, by day, the little Arab sat in the sun and played his capricious tune, were waiting to see the coming of the dawn over the sandy waste.

The Spahi moved as the distant cry first came to his ears.

"Is it the Marabout?" whispered Lady Wyverne, laying her hand on his cloak.

"Hush!"

He listened, leaning forward towards the desert.

"Khali Targa! Khali Targa!
More hard than the rocks where the falcon flies
Is the way to the Prophet's Paradise——"

"It is the voice of Achmed!"

Lady Wyverne turned white.

"But—it can't be! Why, they are at the salt mountain, far away from here!"

"The lash on my loins has fallen like hail.
See! I offer my shaven head to the nail!
Khali Targa! Khali Targa!"

"It is Achmed! They are coming! I see mules on the road!"

"Save me! Where am I to go?"

She sprang up wildly.

But he drew her down again.

"You can't get away now."

"But I must! I must be in the inn when my husband gets there. He'll go straight to my room!"

She struggled with him and began to sob hysterically.

"Be quiet! Keep still!"

He said it quite gently. Yet she stopped at once and remained motionless, silent as one under the influence of an opiate.

"You can't get back. There's only one thing—slip behind the rock! Crouch down! I will let my burnous drop over you!"

Lady Wyverne crept to the back of the rock on which they had been seated and obeyed him. He lifted his great burnous, and replaced it loosely on his shoulders, letting it fall so that it concealed Lady Wyverne's head and shoulders. Her face was pressed against his back and his body felt her troubled breathing. Then he lit a cigarette. His attitude was nonchalant. His dark, keen face was perfectly calm. He drew the cigarette smoke into his throat and let it out rhythmically through his nostrils, quietly watching the mules as they came nearer and nearer. In his long eyes there was the hint of an almost sleepy smile.

Achmed's song had died away now, and Benchaâlal knew that the guide's keen sight had already discovered him, that the guide's swift intelligence had gathered from his motionless attitude that the singing had been heard and that he was prepared for their coming.

Achmed's mule came up level with the Spahi and passed on. Achmed made no sign of recognition, but he looked at Benchaâlal steadily, then beyond him as if seeking for something. Benchaâlal leaned a little backward, letting his burnous drop lower over the crouching woman. And he felt that she shuddered against his body. The mule that bore the victims of Sir Claude's gun followed. Then came Sir Claude. As he drew up, the first rays of the rising sun struck into the eastern sky and touched the houses of the red village upon its little hill. When Sir Claude saw the Spahi he started with surprise, and involuntarily pulled up his mule. For a moment the two men stared at each other; the Englishman with a sort of hard enquiry and suspicion, the Arab with a sleepy languor that told nothing of what was passing in his mind. Always he drew the cigarette smoke into his throat, and let it out through his finely-cut nostrils.

"Bonjour," said Sir Claude, at last, in the rough voice of a weary man.

"Bonjour, m'sieu," said the Spahi, softly. "You have had good sport, I see."

The crouching woman was trembling violently. Benchaâlal leaned still farther back. He feared lest the rider should see the movement of the folds of his burnous, and secretly cursed the timidity of women.

"You are out early, monsieur," said Sir Claude.

"We Spahis are accustomed to early rising, m'sieu. I seldom sleep much after three o'clock."

He thought he saw Sir Claude's steady, strained eyes glance backward as Achmed's had done. But he was not sure. The smoke wreaths of his cigarette, curling up towards the pale sky, in which the last stars had not yet faded, might have tricked his acute vision.

There was a moment of silence. Sir Claude lifted his right hand, laid it down on the mule's neck, and moved as if he were about to dismount. Then he seemed to change his mind, for he suddenly struck the animal with his heel, set his lips together, and rode on without another word.

"Don't move!" whispered the Spahi, without stirring.

The patter of hoofs died quite away.

"Not yet!" he said aloud.

He heard again the sound of convulsive, half-strangled sobbing. Yet even now his face did not change, even now he continued quietly to smoke.

The gorge took the little cavalcade. It was lost in the fastnesses of the rocks. Then the Spahi sprang up, lifted his cloak, and set free the terrified woman.

"Does he know? Did he see me?"

She could scarcely get the words out. Her face was stained with tears and flushed with red in patches.

"Who can tell?"

"He'll go to my room! Oh, God, he'll go to my room!"

"Who can tell? He is tired. He sits like a sack on the mule."

"He'll go! What am I to do? What am I to do?"

Benchaâlal stretched his arm out towards the spaces of the desert.

"Will you come with me—there?"

"He'll find my room empty! He'll come back!"

The Spahi looked at her for a moment. Then he said, coldly:

"Go and wash your face in the river, madame. And then we can speak together. At present it is useless."

Lady Wyverne stared for a moment, as if she did not comprehend what he had said. But the tears dried on her cheeks. And after an instant she turned from him obediently, went to the river-bank, and bent down over the running water.

(To be concluded in next month's "Argosy.")

Night-time Pictures

In the Time of Childhood

WHEN darkness had come, and the moon and stars were shining, his speculations still further increased in range. The stars were to him, in those early days, holes in the floor of heaven, the ceiling of the earth; the moon was a silver ship wherein angels were sailing. How he longed to be sailing with them in that shining vessel! Hours upon hours he spent staring at the stars, wishing he could peep within those tantalising, twinkling holes, and see God on His throne. C. E. Lawrence.

NOW came still evening on, and twilight gray
Had in her sober livery all things clad;
Silence accompanied; for beast and bird,
They to their grassy couch, these to their nests
Were slunk, all but the wakeful nightingale,
She all night long her amorous descant sung;
Silence was pleased: now glow'd the firmament
With living sapphires; Hesperus, that led
The starry host, rode brightest, till the moon,
Rising in clouded majesty, at length
Apparent queen, unveil'd her peerless light,
And o'er the dark her silver mantle threw.

John Milton.

Under Syrian Skies

THEN came the night at the consul's. The poor demure old gentleman brought out his mattresses; and the ladies sleeping round on the divans, we lay down quite happy; and I for my part intended to make as delightful dreams as Alnaschar; but, lo, the delicate mosquito sounded his horn: the active flea jumped up, and came to feast on Christian flesh (the Eastern fleas bite more bitterly than the most savage bug in Christendom), and the bug—oh, the accursed! Why was he made? What duty has that infamous ruffian to perform in the world, save to make people wretched?

Only Bulwer in his most pathetic style could describe the miseries of that night—the moaning, the groaning, the cursing, the tumbling, the blistering, the infamous despair and degradation! I heard all the cocks in Jaffa crow; the children crying, and the mothers hushing them; the donkeys braying fitfully in the moonlight; at last I heard the clatter of hoofs below, and the hailing of men. It was three o'clock, the horses were actually come; nay, there were camels, likewise; asses and mules, pack-saddles and drivers, all bustling together under the moonlight in the cheerful street—and the first night in Syria was over.

William Makepeace Thackeray.

A Vista of the Great Fire

IT being darkish, we saw the fire as only one entire arch of fire from this to the other side the bridge, and in a bow up the hill for an arch of above a mile long: it made me weep to see it. The churches, houses, and all on fire, and flaming at once; and a horrid noise the flames made, and the cracking of houses at their ruin. So home with a sad heart. Samuel Pepys

Prayer Against the Perils of Darkness

CALL for the grandest of all earthly spectacles, what is *that?* It is the sun going to his rest. Call for the grandest of all human sentiments, what is *that?* It is that man should forget his anger before he lies down to sleep. And these two grandeurs, the mighty sentiment and the mighty spectacle, are by Christianity married together.

Here again, in his prayer "Lighten our darkness, we beseech Thee, O Lord!" were the darkness and the great shadows of night made symbolically significant: these great powers, Night and Darkness, that belong to aboriginal Chaos, were made representative of the perils that continually menace poor afflicted human nature. With deepest sympathy I accompanied the prayer against the perils of darkness—perils that I seemed to see in the ambush of midnight solitude, brooding around the beds of sleeping nations; perils from even worse forms of darkness shrouded within the recesses of blind human hearts; perils from temptations weaving unseen snares for our footing; perils from the limitations of our own misleading knowledge. Thomas De Quincey.

WHEN roads are dark and the rain is falling:
When instead of the lark the owl is calling:
When shadowy ghosts of fear and dismay
Rise up in hosts on the drear highway:
When Hope is failing, and Faith lies dead,
And Despair is wailing around your head,
And your lips are dry, and your wine is gall,
And Death says "I am the end of all":
Look not to earth,
Nor the sky above,
But deep in your heart
Trust Love. Max Plowman.

When James the First Was King

I BEGAN to talk to my Bellman, and to ask him, why with such a jingling, and bawling, and beating at men's doors he went about to waken either poor men that were over-wearied with labour, or sick men that had most need of rest? He made answer unto me, that the ringing of his bell was not (like an alarum in a town of garrison), to fright the inhabitants, but rather it was music to charm them faster with sleep: the beating at their doors assured those within that no thieves were entered, nor that false servants had wilfully or negligently suffered the doors to stand open, to have their masters robbed; and that his crying out so loud, was but like the shrill Good Morrow of a cock to put men (that had wealth enough) in mind of the time how it slideth away, and to bid those that were full of business to be watchful for their due hours when they were to rise. Thomas Dekker.

Hours of Magic

A FAIR face looks yet fairer under the light of the moon, and a sweet voice sounds yet sweeter among the whispering sounds of a summer night. Sir Walter Scott.

In Praise of Candle-Light

A SHEEP, when it is dark, has nothing to do but to shut his silly eyes, and sleep if he can. Man found out long sixes—Hail candle-light! Without disparagement to sun or moon, the kindliest luminary of the three—if we may not rather style thee their radiant deputy, mild viceroy of the moon!—We love to read, sit silent, eat, drink, sleep, by candle-light. They are everybody's sun and moon. This is our peculiar and household planet. Wanting it, what savage unsocial nights must our ancestors have spent, wintering in caves and unillumined fastnesses! They must have lain about and grumbled at one another in the dark. What repartees could have passed, when you must have felt about for a smile, and handled a neighbour's cheek to be sure that he understood it. This accounts for the seriousness of the elder poetry (try Hesiod or Ossian), derived from the tradition of those unlantern'd nights. Jokes came in with candles. Charles Lamb.

In the North Sea

THE violent pitching of the ship made it difficult, if not impossible, for any mere landsman to sit or stand. Indeed it would not have been easy to sleep, in spite of the concert that prevailed. First, a beam in one corner seemed taken in labour, then another began groaning,—plank after plank chimed in with its peculiar creak—every bulkhead seemed to fret with an ache in it—sometimes the floor complained of a strain—next the ceiling cried out with a pain in its joints—and then came a general squeezing sound as if the whole vessel was in the last stage of collapse. Add to these the wild howling of the wind through the rigging, till the demon of the storm seemed to be playing coronachs over us on an Æolian harp,—the clatter of hail,—the constant rushes of water around and overhead—and at every uncommon pitch, a chorus of female shrieks from the next cabin.

Thomas Hood.

Of the Moon and the Stars

DAUGHTER of heaven, fair art thou! the silence of thy face is pleasant! Thou comest forth in loveliness. The stars attend thy blue course in the east. The clouds rejoice in thy presence, O moon! They brighten their dark-brown sides. Who is like thee in heaven, light of the silent night? The stars are ashamed in thy presence. They turn away their sparkling eyes. Whither dost thou retire from thy course, when the darkness of thy countenance grows? Hast thou thy hall, like Ossian? Dwellest thou in the shadow of grief? Have thy sisters fallen from heaven? Are they who rejoiced with thee, at night, no more? Yes! they have fallen, fair light! and thou dost often retire to mourn. But thou thyself shalt fail one night, and leave thy blue path in heaven. The stars will then lift their heads: they, who were ashamed in thy presence, will rejoice. Thou art now clothed with thy brightness. Look from thy gates in the sky. Burst the cloud, O wind! that the daughter of night may look forth; that the shaggy mountains may brighten, and the ocean roll its white waves in light. Ossian.

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An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge

They see strange things who look upon Fate

By AMBROSE BIERCE

A MAN stood upon a railroad bridge in Northern Alabama, looking down into the swift waters twenty feet below. The man's hands were behind his back, the wrists bound with a cord. A rope loosely encircled his neck. It was attached to a stout cross-timber above his head, and the slack fell to the level of his knees. Some loose boards laid upon the sleepers supporting the metals of the railway supplied a footing for him and his executioners—two private soldiers of the Federal army, directed by a sergeant, who in civil life may have been a deputy sheriff. At a short remove upon the same temporary platform was an officer in the uniform of his rank, armed. He was a captain. A sentinel at each end of the bridge stood with his rifle in the position known as "support," that is to say, vertical in front of the left shoulder, the hammer resting on the forearm thrown straight across the chest—a formal and unnatural position, enforcing an erect carriage of the body. It did not appear to be the duty of these two men to know what was occurring at the centre of the bridge; they merely blockaded the two ends of the foot plank which traversed it.

Beyond one of the sentinels nobody was in sight; the railroad ran straight away into a forest for a hundred yards, then, curving, was lost to view. Doubtless there was an outpost further along. The other bank of the stream was open ground—a gentle acclivity crowned with a stockade of vertical tree trunks, loop-holed for rifles, with a single embrasure through which protruded the muzzle of a brass cannon commanding the bridge. Midway of the slope between bridge and fort were the spectators—a single company of infantry in line, at "parade rest," the butts of the rifles on the ground, the barrels inclining slightly backward against the right shoulder, the hands crossed upon the stock. A lieutenant stood at the right of the line, the point of his sword upon the ground, his left hand resting upon his right. Excepting the group of four at the centre of the bridge, not a man moved. The company faced the bridge, staring stonily, motionless. The sentinels, facing the banks of the stream, might have been statues to adorn the bridge. The captain stood with folded arms, silent, observing the work of his subordinates but making no sign. Death is a dignitary who, when he comes announced, is to be received with formal manifestations of respect, even by those most familiar with him. In the code of military etiquette silence and fixity are forms of deference.

The man who was engaged in being hanged was apparently about thirty-five years of age. He was a civilian, if one might judge from his dress, which was that of a planter. His features were good—a straight nose, firm mouth, broad forehead, from which his long, dark hair was combed straight back, falling behind his ears to the collar of his well-fitting frock coat. He wore a moustache and pointed beard, but no whiskers; his eyes were large and dark grey and had a kindly expression which one would hardly have expected in one whose neck was in the hemp. Evidently this was no vulgar assassin. The liberal military code makes provision for hanging many kinds of people, and gentlemen are not excluded.

The preparations being complete, the two private soldiers stepped aside and each drew away the plank upon which he had been standing. The sergeant turned to the captain, saluted and placed himself immediately behind that officer, who in turn moved apart one pace. These movements left the condemned man and the

sergeant standing on the two ends of the same plank, which spanned three of the cross-ties of the bridge. The end upon which the civilian stood almost, but not quite, reached a fourth. This plank had been held in place by the weight of the captain; it was now held by that of the sergeant. At a signal from the former, the latter would step aside, the plank would tilt and the condemned man go down between two ties. The arrangement commended itself to his judgment as simple and effective. His face had not been covered nor his eyes bandaged. He looked a moment at his "unsteadfast footing," then let his gaze wander to the swirling water of the stream racing madly beneath his feet. A piece of dancing driftwood caught his attention and his eyes followed it down the current. How slowly it appeared to move! What a sluggish stream!

He closed his eyes in order to fix his last thoughts upon his wife and children. The water, touched to gold by the early sun, the brooding mists under the banks at some distance down the stream, the fort, the soldiers, the piece of drift—all had distracted him. And now he became conscious of a new disturbance. Striking through the thought of his dear ones was a sound which he could neither ignore nor understand, a sharp, distinct, metallic percussion like the stroke of a blacksmith's hammer upon the anvil; it had the same ringing quality. He wondered what it was, and whether immeasurably distant or near by—it seemed both. Its recurrence was regular, but as slow as the tolling of a death knell. He awaited each stroke with impatience and—he knew not why—apprehension. The intervals of silence grew progressively longer; the delays became maddening. With their greater infrequency the sounds increased in strength and sharpness. They hurt his ear like the thrust of a knife; he feared he would shriek. What he heard was the ticking of his watch.

He unclosed his eyes and saw again the water below him. "If I could free my hands," he thought, "I might throw off the noose and spring into the stream. By diving I could evade the bullets, and, swimming vigorously, reach the bank, take to the woods, and get away home. My home, thank God, is as yet outside their lines; my wife and little ones are still beyond the invader's farthest advance."

As these thoughts, which have here to be set down in words, were flashed into the doomed man's brain rather than evolved from it, the captain nodded to the sergeant. The sergeant stepped aside.

II

PEYTON FARQUHAR was a well-to-do planter, of an old and highly-respected Alabama family. Being a slave owner, and, like other slave owners, a politician, he was naturally an original secessionist and ardently devoted to the Southern cause. Circumstances of an imperious nature which it is unnecessary to relate here, had prevented him from taking service with the gallant army which had fought the disastrous campaigns ending with the fall of Corinth, and he chafed under the inglorious restraint, longing for the release of his energies, the larger life of the soldier, the opportunity for distinction. That opportunity, he felt, would come, as it comes to all in war time. Meanwhile he did what he could. No service was too humble for him to perform in aid of the South, no adventure too perilous for him to undertake if consistent with the character of a civilian who was at heart a soldier, and who in good faith and without too much qualification assented to at least a part of the frankly villainous dictum that all is fair in love and war.

One evening while Farquhar and his wife were sitting on a rustic bench near the entrance to his grounds, a grey-clad soldier rode up to the gate and asked for a drink of water. Mrs. Farquhar was only too happy to serve him with her own white hands. While she was gone to fetch the water, her husband approached the dusty horseman and inquired eagerly for news from the front.

"The Yanks are repairing the railroads," said the man, "and are getting ready for another advance. They have reached the Owl Creek Bridge, put it in order, and built a stockade on the other bank. The commandant has issued an order, which is posted everywhere, declaring that any civilian caught interfering with the railroad, its bridges, tunnels, or trains, will be summarily hanged. I saw the order."

"How far is it to the Owl Creek bridge?" Farquhar asked.

"About thirty miles."

"Is there no force on this side the creek?"

" Only a picket post half a mile out, on the railroad, and a single sentinel at this end of the bridge."

" Suppose a man—a civilian and student of hanging—should elude the picket post and perhaps get the better of the sentinel," said Farquhar, smiling, " what could he accomplish ? "

The soldier reflected. " I was there a month ago," he replied. " I observed that the flood of last winter had lodged a great quantity of driftwood against the wooden pier at this end of the bridge. It is now dry and would burn like tow."

The lady had now brought the water, which the soldier drank. He thanked her ceremoniously, bowed to her husband, and rode away. An hour later, after nightfall, he repassed the plantation, going northward in the direction from which he had come. He was a Federal scout.

III

AS Peyton Farquhar fell straight down through the bridge, he lost consciousness and was as one already dead. From this state he was awakened—ages later, it seemed to him—by the pain of a sharp pressure upon his throat, followed by a sense of suffocation. Keen, poignant agonies seemed to shoot from his neck downward through every fibre of his body and limbs. These pains appeared to flash along well-defined lines of ramification, and to beat with an inconceivably rapid periodicity. They seemed like streams of pulsating fire heating him to an intolerable temperature. As to his head, he was conscious of nothing but a feeling of fulness—of congestion. These sensations were unaccompanied by thought. The intellectual part of his nature was already effaced ; he had power only to feel, and feeling was torment. He was conscious of motion. Encompassed in a luminous cloud, of which he was now merely the fiery heart, without material substance, he swung through unthinkable arcs of oscillation, like a vast pendulum. Then all at once, with terrible suddenness, the light about him shot upward with the noise of a loud plash ; a frightful roaring was in his ears, and all was cold and dark. The power of thought was restored ; he knew that the rope had broken and he had fallen into the stream. There was no additional strangulation ; the noose about his neck was already suffocating him, and kept the water from his lungs. To die of hanging at the bottom of a river !—the idea seemed to him ludicrous. He opened his eyes in the blackness and saw above him a gleam of light, but how distant, how inaccessible ! He was still sinking, for the light became fainter and fainter until it was a mere glimmer. Then it began to grow and brighten, and he knew that he was rising toward the surface—knew it with reluctance, for he was now very comfortable. " To be hanged and drowned," he thought, " that is not so bad ; but I do not wish to be shot. No ; I will not be shot ; that is not fair."

He was not conscious of an effort, but a sharp pain in his wrists apprised him that he was trying to free his hands. He gave the struggle his attention, as an idler might observe the feat of a juggler, without interest in the outcome. What splendid effort !—what magnificent, what superhuman strength ! Ah, that was a fine endeavour ! Bravo ! The cord fell away ; his arms parted and floated upward, the hands dimly seen on each side in the growing light. He watched them with a new interest as first one and then the other pounced upon the noose at his neck. They tore it away and thrust it fiercely aside, its undulations resembling those of a water-snake. " Put it back, put it back ! " He thought he shouted these words to his hands, for the undoing of the noose had been succeeded by the direst pang which he had yet experienced. His neck ached horribly ; his brain was on fire ; his heart which had been fluttering faintly, gave a great leap, trying to force itself out at his mouth. His whole body was racked and wrenched with an insupportable anguish ! But his disobedient hands gave no heed to the command. They beat the water vigorously with quick, downward strokes, forcing him to the surface. He felt his head emerge ; his eyes were blinded by the sunlight ; his chest expanded convulsively, and with a supreme and crowning agony his lungs engulfed a great draught of air, which instantly he expelled in a shriek !

He was now in full possession of his physical senses. They were, indeed, preternaturally keen and alert. Something in the awful disturbance of his organic system had so exalted and refined them that they made record of things never before perceived. He felt the ripples upon his face

and heard their separate sounds as they struck. He looked at the forest on the bank of the stream, saw the individual trees, the leaves and the veining of each leaf—saw the very insects upon them, the locusts, the brilliant-bodied flies, the grey spiders stretching their webs from twig to twig. He noted the prismatic colours in all the dewdrops upon a million blades of grass. The humming of the gnats that danced above the eddies of the stream, the beating of the dragon flies' wings, the strokes of the water spiders' legs, like oars which had lifted their boat—all these made audible music. A fish slid along beneath his eyes and he heard the rush of its body parting the water.

He had come to the surface facing down the stream; in a moment the visible world seemed to wheel slowly round, himself the pivotal point, and he saw the bridge, the fort, the soldiers upon the bridge, the captain, the sergeant, the two privates, his executioners. They were in silhouette against the blue sky. They shouted and gesticulated, pointing at him; the captain had drawn his pistol, but did not fire; the others were unarmed. Their movements were grotesque and horrible, their forms gigantic.

Suddenly he heard a sharp report and something struck the water smartly within a few inches of his head, spattering his face with spray. He heard a second report, and saw one of the sentinels with his rifle at his shoulder, a light cloud of blue smoke rising from the muzzle. The man in the water saw the eye of the man on the bridge gazing into his own through the sights of the rifle. He observed that it was a grey eye, and remembered having read that grey eyes were keenest and that all famous marksmen had them. Nevertheless, this one had missed.

A counter swirl had caught Farquhar and turned him half round; he was again looking into the forest on the bank opposite the fort. The sound of a clear, high voice in a monotonous sing-song now rang out behind him and came across the water with a distinctness that pierced and subdued all other sounds, even the beating of the ripples in his ears. Although no soldier, he had frequented camps enough to know the dread significance of that deliberate drawling, aspirated chant; the lieutenant on shore was taking a part in the morning's work. How coldly and pitilessly—with what an even, calm intonation, presaging and enforcing tranquillity in the men—with what accurately-measured intervals fell those cruel words:

"Attention, company. . . . Shoulder arms. . . . Ready. . . . Aim. . . . Fire."

Farquhar dived—dived as deeply as he could. The water roared in his ears like the voice of Niagara, yet he heard the dulled thunder of the volley, and rising again towards the surface, met shining bits of metal, singularly flattened, oscillating slowly downward. Some of them touched him on the face and hands, then fell away, continuing their descent. One lodged between his collar and neck; it was uncomfortably warm, and he snatched it out.

As he rose to the surface, gasping for breath, he saw that he had been a long time under water; he was perceptibly farther down stream—nearer to safety. The soldiers had almost finished reloading; the metal ramrods flashed all at once in the sunshine as they were drawn from the barrels, turned in the air, and thrust into their sockets. The two sentinels fired again, independently and ineffectually.

The hunted man saw all this over his shoulder; he was now swimming vigorously with the current. His brain was as energetic as his arms and legs; he thought with the rapidity of lightning.

"The officer," he reasoned, "will not make that martinet's error a second time. It is as easy to dodge a volley as a single shot. He has probably already given the command to fire at will. God help me, I cannot dodge them all!"

An appalling plash within two yards of him, followed by a loud rushing sound, *diminuendo*, which seemed to travel back through the air to the fort and died in an explosion which stirred the very river to its deeps! A rising sheet of water, which curved over him, fell down upon him, blinded him, strangled him! The cannon had taken a hand in the game. As he shook his head free from the commotion of the smitten water, he heard the deflected shot humming through the air ahead, and in an instant it was cracking and smashing the branches in the forest beyond.

"They will not do that again," he thought; "the next time they will use a charge of grape. I must keep my eye upon the gun; the smoke will apprise me—the report arrives too late; it lags behind the missile. It is a good gun."

Suddenly he felt himself whirled round and round—spinning like a top. The water, the banks, the forest, the now distant bridge, fort and men—all were commingled and blurred. Objects were represented by their colours only; circular horizontal streaks of colour—that was all he saw. He had been caught in a vortex and was being whirled on with a velocity of advance and gyration which made him giddy and sick. In a few moments he was flung upon the gravel at the foot of the left bank of the stream—the southern bank—and behind a projecting point which concealed him from his enemies. The sudden arrest of his motion, the abrasion of one of his hands on the gravel, restored him and he wept with delight. He dug his fingers into the sand, threw it over himself in handfuls and audibly blessed it. It looked like gold, like diamonds, rubies, emeralds; he could think of nothing beautiful which it did not resemble. The trees upon the bank were giant garden plants; he noted a definite order in their arrangement, inhaled the fragrance of their blooms. A strange, roseate light shone through the spaces among their trunks, and the wind made in their branches the music of æolian harps. He had no wish to perfect his escape, was content to remain in that enchanting spot until retaken.

A whizz and rattle of grapeshot among the branches high above his head roused him from his dream. The baffled cannoneer had fired him a random farewell. He sprang to his feet, rushed up the sloping bank, and plunged into the forest.

All that day he travelled, laying his course by the rounding sun. The forest seemed interminable; nowhere did he discover a break in it, not even a woodman's road. He had not known that he lived in so wild a region. There was something uncanny in the revelation.

By nightfall he was fatigued, footsore, famishing. The thought of his wife and children urged him on. At last he found a road which led him in what he knew to be the right direction. It was as wide and straight as a city street, yet it seemed untravelled. No fields bordered it, no dwelling anywhere. Not so much as the barking of a dog suggested human habitation. The black bodies of the great trees formed a straight wall on both sides, terminating on the horizon in a point, like a diagram in a lesson in perspective. Overhead, as he looked up through this rift in the wood, shone great golden stars looking unfamiliar and grouped in strange constellations. He was sure they were arranged in some order which had a secret and malign significance. The wood on either side was full of singular noises among which—once, twice, and again—he distinctly heard whispers in an unknown tongue.

His neck was in pain, and, lifting his hand to it, he found it horribly swollen. He knew that it had a circle of black where the rope had bruised it. His eyes felt congested; he could no longer close them. His tongue was swollen with thirst; he relieved its fever by thrusting it forward from between his teeth into the cool air. How softly the turf had carpeted the untravelled avenue! He could no longer feel the roadway beneath his feet!

Doubtless, despite his suffering, he fell asleep while walking, for now he sees another scene—perhaps he has merely recovered from a delirium. He stands at the gate of his own home. All is as he left it, and all bright and beautiful in the morning sunshine. He must have travelled the entire night. As he pushes open the gate and passes up the wide white walk, he sees a flutter of female garments; his wife, looking fresh and cool and sweet, steps down from the veranda to meet him. At the bottom of the steps she stands waiting, with a smile of ineffable joy, an attitude of matchless grace and dignity. Ah, how beautiful she is! He springs forward with extended arms. As he is about to clasp her, he feels a stunning blow upon the back of the neck; a blinding white light blazes all about him, with a sound like the shock of a cannon—then all is darkness and silence!

Peyton Farquhar was dead: his body, with a broken neck, swung gently from side to side beneath the timbers of the Owl Creek bridge.

Memoirs of a Yellow Dog

A fellow-feeling and its humorous result

By O. HENRY

I DON'T suppose it will knock any of you people off your perch to read a contribution from an animal. Mr. Kipling and a good many others have demonstrated the fact that animals can express themselves in remunerative English and no magazine goes to press nowadays without an animal story in it, except the old-style monthlies that are still running pictures of Bryan and the Mont Pelée horror.

But you needn't look for any stuck-up literature in my piece, such as Bearoo the bear, and Snakoo the snake, and Tammanoo the tiger, talk in the jungle books. A yellow dog that's spent most of his life in a cheap New York flat, sleeping in a corner on an old sateen underskirt (the one she spilled port wine on at the Lady Longshoremen's banquet), mustn't be expected to perform any tricks with the art of speech.

I was born a yellow pup; date, locality, pedigree and weight unknown. The first thing I can recollect, an old woman had me in a basket at Broadway and Twenty-third trying to sell me to a fat lady. Old Mother Hubbard was boosting me to beat the band as a genuine Pomeranian-Hambletonian-Red-Irish-Cochin-China-Stoke-Pogis fox terrier. The fat lady chased a V around among the samples of gros grain flannelette in her shopping bag till she cornered it and gave up. From that moment I was a pet—a mamma's own wootsey squidlums. Say, gentle reader, did you ever have a two-hundred-pound woman breathing a flavour of Camembert cheese and Peau d'Espagne pick you up and wallop her nose all over you, remarking all the time in an Emma Eames tone of voice: "Oh, oo's um oodlum, doodlum, woodlum, toodlum, bitsy-witsy skoodlums?"

From a pedigreed yellow pup I grew up to be an anonymous yellow cur looking like a cross between an Angora cat and a box of lemons. But my mistress never tumbled. She thought that the two primeval pups that Noah chased into the ark were but a collateral branch of my ancestors. It took two policemen to keep her from entering me at the Madison Square Garden for the Siberian bloodhound prize.

I'll tell you about that flat. The house was the ordinary thing in New York, paved with Parian marble in the entrance hall and cobblestones above the first floor. Our flat was three fl—well, not flights—climbs up. My mistress rented it unfurnished and put in the regular things—1903 antique upholstered parlour set, oil chromo of geishas in a Harlem tea house, rubber plant and husband.

By Sirius! there was a biped I felt sorry for. He was a little man with sandy hair and whiskers a good deal like mine. Henpecked?—well, toucans and flamingoes and pelicans all had their bills in him. He wiped the dishes and listened to my mistress tell about the cheap, ragged things the lady with the squirrel-skin coat on the second floor hung out on her line to dry. And every evening while she was getting supper she made him take me out on the end of a string for a walk.

If men knew how women pass the time when they are alone they'd never marry. Laura Lean Jibbey, peanut brittle, a little almond cream on the neck muscles, dishes unwashed, half-an-hour's talk with the iceman, reading a package of old letters, a couple of pickles and two bottles of malt extract, one hour peeking through a hole in the window shade into the flat across the air-shaft—that's about all there is to it. Twenty minutes before time for him to come home from work she straightens up the house, fixes her rat so it won't show and gets out a lot of sewing for a ten-minute bluff.

I led a dog's life in that flat. 'Most all day I lay there in my corner watching the fat woman kill time. I slept sometimes and had pipe dreams about being out chasing cats into basements and growling

at all ladies with black mittens, as a dog was intended to do. Then she would pounce upon me with a lot of that drivelling poodle palaver and kiss me on the nose—but what could I do? A dog can't chew cloves.

I began to feel sorry for Hubby, dog my cats if I didn't. We looked so much alike that people noticed it when we went out; so we shook the streets that Morgan's cab drives down and took to climbing the piles of last December's snow on the streets where cheap people live.

One evening when we were thus promenading and I was trying to look like a prize St. Bernard and the old man was trying to look like he wouldn't have murdered the first organ-grinder he heard play Mendelssohn's wedding-march, I looked up at him and said, in my way:

"What are you looking so sour about, you oakum-trimmed lobster? She don't kiss you. You don't have to sit on her lap and listen to talk that would make the book of a musical comedy sound like the maxims of Epictetus. You ought to be thankful you're not a dog. Brace up, Benedick, and bid the blues begone."

The matrimonial mishap looked down at me with almost canine intelligence in his face.

"Why, doggie," says he, "good doggie. You almost look like you could speak. What is it, doggie—Cats?"

Cats! Could speak!

But, of course, he couldn't understand. Humans were denied the speech of animals. The only common ground of communication upon which dogs and men can get together is in fiction.

In the flat across the hall from us lived a lady with a black-and-tan terrier. Her husband strung it and took it out every evening, but he always came home cheerful and whistling. One day I touched noses with the black-and-tan in the hall and I struck him for an elucidation.

"See here, Wiggle-and-Skip," I says, "you know that it ain't the nature of a real man to play dry nurse to a dog in public. I never saw one leashed to a bow-wow yet that didn't look like he'd like to lick every other man that looked at him. But your boss comes in every day as perky and set up as an amateur prestidigitator doing the egg trick. How does he do it? Don't tell me he likes it."

"Him?" says the black-and-tan. "Why, he uses Nature's Own Remedy. He gets spifflicated. At first when we go out he's as shy as the man on the steamer who would rather play pedro when they make 'em all jackpots. By the time we've been in eight saloons he don't care whether the thing on the end of his line is a dog or a catfish. I've lost two inches of my tail trying to sidestep those swinging doors."

The pointer I got from that terrier—vaudeville please copy—set me to thinking.

One evening about six o'clock my mistress ordered him to get busy and do the ozone act for Lovey. I have concealed it until now, but that is what she called me. The black-and-tan was called "Tweetness." I consider that I have the bulge on him as far as you could chase a rabbit. Still "Lovey" is something of a nomenclatural tin-can on the tail of one's self-respect.

At a quiet place on a safe street I tightened the line of my custodian in front of an attractive refined saloon. I made a dead-ahead scramble for the doors, whining like a dog in the press despatches that lets the family know that little Alice is bogged while gathering lilies in the brook.

"Why, darn my eyes," says the old man with a grin; "darn my eyes if the saffron-coloured son of a seltzer lemonade ain't asking me in to take a drink. Lemme see—how long's it been since I saved shoe leather by keeping one foot on the foot-rest? I believe I'll——"

I knew I had him. Hot Scotches he took, sitting at a table. For an hour he kept the Campbells coming. I sat by his side rapping for the waiter with my tail and eating free lunch such as mamma in her flat never equalled with her home-made truck bought at a delicatessen store eight minutes before papa comes home.

When the products of Scotland were all exhausted except the rye bread the old man unwound me from the table leg and played me outside like a fisherman plays a salmon. Out there he took off my collar and threw it into the street.

"Poor doggie," says he; "good doggie. She shan't kiss you any more. 'S a darned shame. Good doggie, go away and get run over by a street car and be happy."

I refused to leave. I leaped and frisked around the old man's legs happy as a pug on a rug.

"You old flea-headed woodchuck-chaser," I said to him—"you moon-baying, rabbit-pointing, egg-stealing old beagle, can't you see that I don't want to

leave you? Can't you see that we're both Pups in the Wood and the missis is the cruel uncle after you with the dish towel and me with the flea liniment and a pink bow to tie on my tail. Why not cut that all out and be pards for evermore?"

Maybe you'll say he didn't understand—maybe he didn't. But he kind of got a grip on the Hot Scotches and stood still for a minute, thinking.

"Doggie," says he finally, "we don't live more than a dozen lives on this earth and very few of us live to be more than three-hundred. If I ever see that flat any more I'm a flat, and if you do you're flatter; and that's no flattery. I'm offering sixty to one that Westward Ho wins out by the length of a dachshund."

There was no string, but I frolicked along with my master to the Twenty-third Street ferry. And the cats on the route saw reason to give thanks that prehensile claws had been given them.

On the Jersey side my master said to a stranger who stood eating a currant bun:

"Me and my doggie, we are bound for the Rocky Mountains."

But what pleased me most was when my old man pulled both of my ears until I howled and said:

"You common, monkey-headed, rat-tailed, sulphur-coloured son of a door mat, do you know what I'm going to call you?"

I thought of "Lovey," and I whined dolefully.

"I'm going to call you 'Pete,'" says my master; and if I'd had five tails I couldn't have done enough wagging to do justice to the occasion.

LOVE AND LIFE

ALL my past life is mine no more;
The flying hours are gone,
Like transitory dreams given o'er,
Whose images are kept in store
By memory alone.

The time that is to come is not;
How can it then be mine?
The present moment's all my lot;
And that, as fast as it is got,
Phillis, is only thine.

Then talk not of inconstancy,
False hearts, and broken vows;
If I by miracle can be
This live-long minute true to thee,
'Tis all that Heaven allows.

EARL OF ROCHESTER.

Blue Beads

Family history—and a grim epilogue

By MARY E. MANN

SHE lay all day long on her bed, and often she lay and moaned. She was crippled by rheumatism, and sometimes she moaned because the pain was acute and she could not forbear, but oftener for a distraction from the monotony of silence, listening to herself as she did so. The only other diversion she had was when Alice, the fifteen years old maid-of-all-work, brought her food at stated periods. The food she was glad to see because it marked the passing of the long hours, more than because she needed to eat. Also because sometimes she could then prevail on Alice to talk.

She had enjoyed a life with the average amount of happiness; she had been young, she always thought she had been pretty—which is as useful as the real thing, when once the prettiness is gone—she had had plenty of friends. But now she was old, ugly, and distorted with pain, and she lived by herself in Acacia Cottage, in the depths of the country, and Alice, her maid-of-all-work, was her only society.

Alice was lumpy, and fat, and red-haired. Sometimes she was attentive to her mistress, and sometimes she neglected her. But it was necessary to put up with Alice, because difficult to find a girl who would endure the loneliness. She was recently from school, too, and sometimes would read to her mistress portions from her prize books, and sometimes she would talk.

The moaning, which was the expression of the sufferer's pain or her boredom, had been unusually noisy one autumn afternoon, and Alice, coming leisurely up the steep stairs to the bedroom, tea-tray in hands, was irritated by it.

"That ain't no arthly good your a-carrin' on like that, Miss," she said as, kicking open the door with her foot, she entered. She carried the tray to the big four-post bedstead, beneath the shade of whose drab moreen curtains lay the shrivelled, twisted little old lady who was her mistress. "Your a-groanin' don't make the water bile q iicker, nor yet the toast get brown."

She set the tray on the unoccupied side of the bed, and went round to the other side, to lift the old woman higher on her pillows.

"I groan aloud with pain, Alice. Night and day I am in pain."

"'Tis very mel'ncholy for me, that ain't," Alice said. She threw a white woollen shawl over the arched back and shoulders. "I suppose you don't think o' that?" she asked, and the invalid only responded with a shriek of pain, as she tried to raise herself in bed.

"I should wish to be dead if I was you, Miss."

The poor mistress wept a little at that: "I do sometimes long for release," she admitted.

The tea-cup shook in her cramped fingers: "Climb on the bed beside me, and give me my tea, Alice."

So Alice clambered up, and held the cup to the shaking lips; her manipulations were not skilful, and as much of the drab-looking, half-cold fluid fell on the sheet as went down the poor throat.

The mistress took one slice of the divided round of buttered toast; Alice, by invitation, ate the other.

"You've got on your new afternoon frock, Alice. You look very nice."

"The one made out o' that old 'un of yours."

"And the nice warm petticoat, Alice?"

"Here it be," said Alice, and pulled up the frock to show it. "What I want next is shoes." She held up one coarse foot in a boot through which the toes were bulging. "These here have seen their best days, Miss."

"If your feet were not so big you could have mine," the mistress said. "I shall not want them any more."

"You won't!" Alice said, and turned her prominent, large blue eyes to stare at the old woman when she whimpered over the thought.

"If you're a good girl, and kind to me, and will stay with me, I'll give you some new boots at Christmas, Alice."

"I'd a sight rather have the blue beads."

"The blue beads?"

"Yes. Out of that little leather box on your dressing-table."

"You're not to interfere with the things in that box, Alice."

"I can't help a-seein' 'em when I'm dustin.' I think they're pretty. They'd go nice with my eyes and my coloured hair. I should like to have 'em."

"You could not possibly wear them, Alice."

"Couldn't I? Why not?"

"They wouldn't be suitable."

"Didn't you never wear them?"

"I wore them. I was a little girl when I wore them. A pretty little, little girl." She laid down the piece of toast she was nibbling and whimpered at the recollection.

"I ain't such a very big one, Miss. Leastways, I ain't old."

"The cases are quite different. What was seemly for me would not be for you. Although I lie here lonely and helpless all day long, I am a lady. My father was a gentleman; and my grandfather before him."

"My gran'father was hanged," Alice said, pleasurably recalling the fact.

The old mistress turned her head on the pillow and looked at the girl beside her, sitting upright on the bed, and giving forth that disturbing piece of intelligence as if it were a matter for pride: "You never told me that before, Alice. Is it really true?"

"He were hanged, safe enough," said Alice equably: "And so were my cousin Joe."

"You should certainly have told me!"

"Why? I never give it a thought."

"Do you mean they—*murdered* people, Alice?"

"That they did, Miss. The old chap, he did for two of 'em at once. An old man and woman they was, as lived back of a little shop. He were a woodman, gran'father were, and one day when he was a-passin', he'd got his chopper handy, and he went in and downed 'em both at once."

"Killed them? Really killed them? How horrible, Alice!"

"Bashed both their hids in. They ketched him, through his chopper—and what was on it. The perlice did."

"What a terrible man!"

"I never heard mother say as he were. Mother, she finely took on at his hangin'."

"And your Cousin Joe, Alice?"

"That weren't in these parts. We read it in the paper, else we shouldn't have knowed. He took a little boy into a field and done him in, my Cousin Joe did."

"Murdered him? What for?"

"His clo'es, I suppose, and his boots. He'd sold 'em for sixpence when they catched him."

"And he was hanged? Hanged for sixpence?"

"He wanted the sixpence," Alice explained, serenely.

The old woman, peering up at the girl beside her with her dim, blear eyes, forgot to moan in the grip of the interest she felt. Her life had been long, and she had known many people, but never one nearly related to murderers before!

"It is a terrible family history!" at length she said. "You must be thankful, Alice, for a better bringing up than they could have had. You must give thanks for your Church, and your school, and your teachers."

"Yes," said Alice.

"And if I were you I would not mention to any one else in the village that story. It might tell against you in people's minds."

"I don't see that. I'm not likely to down anyone with a chopper, like gran'father, nor yet to strangle a little boy with a boot-lace like my Cousin Joe."

"But these things tell against a person. Take my advice and do not speak of them."

"May I have the blue beads to wear when I go to Chech, come Sunday?"

"My blue beads? No, certainly not. And get off the bed, Alice. I wish to be kind to you, and to allow you to talk to me; but you are not to take liberties."

¶

HER mistress spared Alice to go to Church on Sunday afternoons, and from one week to the next the old lady dreaded that couple of hours when she found herself shut into the house alone. Alice would come into the bedroom to display herself in her short black frock and her long black jacket, her great hands and wrists emerging bare from the sleeves. She wore her large green straw hat pushed to the back of her head, exposing all her copper-coloured hair combed in straight thick bands down her soap-polished face; she always blacked that portion of her stocking which showed through her broken shoes.

"I'm now a-goin', Miss," she would

announce in tones of joyful anticipation; and having walked across the room to make a survey of herself in the long plate glass of the wardrobe, would depart, lumbering down the stairs to let herself out, and turn the key noisily in the lock; a sound full of terror to the lonely old woman, moaning upon her bed.

Alice had not been many Sundays in the place, and so far had not been successful in attracting to herself one of the hobble-de-hoys who hung about the four cross-ways by the village school, or waited for the emerging congregation at the Church gate. But on this auspicious afternoon, when the yellow leaves from the lime-trees by the Church wall fluttered slowly through the heavy air to find a resting place upon the nameless graves, when the sun beyond the fresh ploughed fields was sinking a dull red globe in a sullen sky and a white mist hovered over the wet meadows, and hid on all sides the distant prospect, a youth did accost Alice as she issued from the Churchyard gate.

"What fine blue beads we've got!" he said, and put out a clumsy finger and thumb, pretending to grab the necklace at Alice's throat.

He expected to be told "to git along," to "shut his ugly mug for fear the top of his hid would fall off," or such like familiar witticisms for his pains; but Alice had not longed each Sunday afternoon for a young man to walk with to rebuff him so.

"They're pretty, aren't they? Do you like 'em, really?" she asked, and grinned up delightedly into his sheep-face.

"They're same colour as my eyes, and go wi' my hair. Tha's why I wear 'em," she explained.

"You wasn't a-wearin' of 'em las' Sunday. I seen ye las' Sunday and the Sunday afore."

"Why didn't you speak to me, then? I hadn't got no one to walk with."

"I was a-walkin' along of Tatty Chivers, what was housemaid down at Potters'. She's left her place, Tatty have."

"You may walk along of me, if you like."

"I don't know as I keer to."

"You jolly well will when you've tried it. I had a young chap to walk with, afore I come here. You're the first I have happed with, since."

With a little more pressure Sheep-face put himself alongside, and where Alice liked to take him for her constitutional, allowed himself to be dragged.

They walked beneath the dripping trees along the road, meeting other couples as happily mated as they. Alice cheeked them as they passed. She was supremely blest. Her reproach was taken away; she was as good as any of them—she had a young man to walk with! They crawled between wet hedges down muddy lanes, they stood still to look at nothing over gates; and by this time the arm of Sheep-face was around that substantial waist of Alice.

When Alice reached home she was an hour later than her allotted time: "I don't keer if I am!" Alice said, and put out her tongue at the white face of the kitchen clock which she felt to be accusing her. "There'll be a hullabaloo!" she promised herself, knowing that her mistress should long ago have had her tea. She got it ready in a hurry, stuffing slabs of bread and butter and chunks of cake into her mouth as she did so; for she was hungry; making love to Sheep-face had been an exhausting exercise.

"Now for a wiggin'! And if she ask where I've been and what I've been a' doin' she'll hear the truth, 'ont she!" she said, with her tongue in her cheek, as, tray in hand, she kicked open the bedroom door.

But not a question on the subject was put to her, the mistress being full of another matter:

"Alice, where are the blue beads that were in the leather box on the dressing-table?"

"The blue beads? What, them you wore when you wos a little girl, Miss?"

"Where are they?"

"Why, where should they be but in the leather box on your dressin'-table, still?"

"They are not there. I crawled out of bed to look for them. They are not there."

Alice put down the tray upon the side of the bed, and crossed to the dressing-table. The beads were clutched in her hand. It was easy, her back to the bed, to slip them into the box: "Finely you must have looked Miss!" and turning round, box in hand, she held up the beads for inspection.

"Bring them to me." She took them eagerly in her stiffened fingers; they were warm from the hot hand that had held them.

The old woman's eyes turned on the girl were eloquent of accusation and reproach. Yet not a word of either dared she speak. She was so helpless and alone. It was so difficult to find a girl to "do" for her.

" I wore the beads when I was a little girl," she said; " I'll wear them now while I live. They shall be put with me into the coffin."

She began to cry miserably as she always did at the thought of her own demise. She cried into her teacup. The three front teeth which were all that remained to her rattled against the brim; her slice of bread and butter was flavoured with her salt tears; but she contrived to keep the string of beads still safely clutched in her hand; and when Alice saw them again they showed their alluring bird's egg blue through the lace of the night-gown around the shrivelled, brown throat.

Alice sulked for two days. It was very uncomfortable for the mistress when the maid sulked. The meals were hardly any break in the blankness of the day if Alice, carrying them in, would only answer her anxious attempts at conversation with monosyllables. On the third day the baker was to call. Little tit-bits of interest which Alice gleaned from him—the number of loaves they took at the Rectory, the interesting fact that down at Potters' he now left none but Standard loaves, his remarks on the weather, and the state of his invalid wife's health—she carefully retailed, when in a good temper, to her mistress upstairs. So that " Baker's day " was a red letter day at Acacia Cottage.

Was Alice going to sulk through it? The old lady heard the wheels of the baker's cart stop at the gate, heard the loud opening of the door, heard his voice rumbling on, beneath her window. She waited for Alice to come, and waited in vain. Then she rang her bell.

" I should like a glass of milk, Alice."

" 'Tisn't your time for it, Miss."

" All the same, I should like it."

From the look that Alice turned on her, from the sound of her footsteps as she departed, the poor mistress knew the maid still sulked.

She felt for the beads beneath her night-gown, caressing them with a distorted, shaking hand. She had worn them when she was a little girl, dressed by her mother. At her parties, at the pantomime, at all the little gala functions of her childhood, she had worn her pretty pale blue beads!

And Alice! Ugly, slipshod Alice, with her great coarse throat!

" Has the baker been? " she asked when the milk was brought. " Aren't you going to tell me what he said? "

" No," said Alice.

" You are not being kind to me as you promised, Alice. You are being cruel to me."

Alice turned to go away.

" Alice! " Alice stopped short. " Alice, I've just been thinking—since you like them so much—I'll—I'll leave you my blue beads when I die." The words were accompanied by a burst of weeping.

" Will you, Miss? " Alice came eagerly back to the bed. " I'd like to have 'em finely. Perhaps you'd better put it down in writin', Miss, if you wouldn't mind."

All Alice's good humour was back. The baker had been extra communicative. All kinds of interesting remarks he had made. The maid-of-all-work neglected her work downstairs to report them, sitting on the side of her mistress's bed. And even when at length she went she quickly returned, bringing pen and ink and paper. Holding the poor mistress in a sitting posture with her arm around her she helped her to scrawl the few words " My blue beads are for Alice," and to sign her name.

¶

BUT on the next Sunday Alice must go to Church without the beads.

At the church-gate was Sheep-face, sure enough, but with no eyes for her. A new housemaid from Potters' had appeared, wearing a long white scarf whose two ends fell over her shoulders at the back; and these ends Sheep-face held, and with loud guffaws drove the young lady in front of him.

Alice called after the pair certain expressions not worth recording. But the new housemaid, entering into the spirit of the joke, began to frisk and curvet like a horse; and Sheep-face, yelling encouragement, gambolled after her. The other girls, in service, and younger girls, " not out yet," of her own class, all had attendant swains. No one looked at Alice, in her long black jacket with only the frill of white lace round her great red throat.

Standing unnoticed beneath the lime-trees she watched the last couple away. Then she turned, and running, swiftly as bad boots and clumsy movements would allow, made her way to a village four miles off where her mother, a widow, lived, keeping house for her brother who was an under-keeper.

By lane and sheep-walk and meadow-path she went by a short cut that she knew; across fields, knee deep in wet turnip tops,

over fresh-ploughed lands in which she sank to her ankles, plunging heavily along, not feeling the weariness of the way because of her ardour to achieve the goal in view.

But that goal was not her mother's cottage. She passed the back of it, not giving it a look or a thought, and made her way to a meadow, near by. A meadow bordered on two sides by a thick plantation, where in the spring-time she had watched her brother at work; where the young pheasants had been reared.

The keepers' wooden hut stood there still, its wheels sunk in the long lush grass. Its interior was filled with half-emptied sacks, with rusty traps, with bags of poisoned meal for the benefit of the rats. With none of these familiar objects had Alice business now.

Along one side of the hut, high up against the roof, ran a little shelf where stood several empty bottles, and one or two dirty jars covered with dust and cobwebs. One summer evening, Alice had watched her brother putting poison into the wasps' nests in banks and hollow trees. The wasps had been a pest that year. Alice knew exactly which jar it was—a piece of rag tied over its mouth—she had been forbidden to take it in her hand, for fear of accident. She took it in her hand now, and holding it beneath her jacket carried it back to Acacia Cottage.

Before she went to bed that night, she wrote a letter. She was fluent with her pen, having been reckoned a good scholar at the village school.

"My dear Swetehart," she wrote. "You was crule to me today. Was you ashamed I had no long-taled scarf for you to drive me by. I thort you and her did look a fool. It wor diffrunt when I wor my blue Bedes. Will you wate for me nex Sunday at the chech gate and I will ware them agin so as you ar not ashamed to walk along of me. You shall have a swete kiss afore we part like we done afore. Your loveing swetehart, Alice."

Then followed numerous noughts and crosses to represent love and kisses, and a "P.S. Look out for the Blue bedes."

On the Saturday morning it happened that the doctor paid a visit to his incurable old patient. He took the maid-of-all-work aside when he came downstairs and warned her that her mistress was losing ground.

"I find her heart much feebler," he said. "You must be very attentive, and never leave her for long. She might die at any moment."

Alice opened wide her prominent blue eyes with their sand-coloured fringes: "Do you think she'll die afore to-morrow?" she asked.

It was impossible to say. He left some medicine to be given on emergency. Her heart was in such a condition that at any minute it might stop. She must not be left at night. Alice must make up a bed in the same room.

Alice did so, and slept like a top, although the poor old woman moaned through the whole night. Just before dawn however, the mistress fell asleep, and awoke to find the maid in her coarse night-gown standing by the bedside, her red, short hair standing off stiffly from her face and shoulders.

"Why do you look at me like that?" the startled woman asked; for Alice's face was within an inch of her own.

"I thought you wasn't goin' to wake no more," Alice said. "You looked for all the world as if you was dead."

The sick woman cried at that, and sent Alice to dress, and told her never again to hold her face so close to her own, to frighten her so.

At dinner-time she had revived in courage, and ate a tiny bit of the chicken Alice had cooked for her, it being Sunday, and a spoonful of the sago pudding.

"You're going to church, Alice?"

Alice was already dressed; all but the green hat and the jacket.

"You won't be late, Alice! You won't leave me alone long, to-day?"

Alice wasn't "a-goin' just yet," she reassured her. Not till her missus had drunk the physic the doctor had given her. Nice physic it were, he had said, and would keep her quiet till Alice came home.

It did keep her quiet, after quite a short time. Very quiet. So quiet, that Alice, without much trouble, and meeting with no resistance could take the blue beads from beneath the lace of the night-gown and fasten them about her own throat. . . .

Sheep-face, in anticipation no doubt of the promised sweet kiss, was at the church gate after service. Alice saw him as she issued with the rest from the church porch, waiting beneath the now leafless limes. She fought her way through the little crowd in the churchyard porch to get ahead of the new housemaid from Potters' with the long white scarf.

"I ha' got on my blue beads," Alice told him, drawing his attention to the ornament. "They're mine. My missus left 'em to me in a will. And she's dead."

The Pope's Mule

Concerning the payment of an old score

By ALPHONSE DAUDET

OF all the clever sayings, proverbs, or saws with which our Provence peasants embellish their discourse, I know of none more picturesque or more peculiar than this. Within a radius of fifteen leagues of my mill, when anybody mentions a spiteful, vindictive man, he will say: "Look out for that man! he is like the Pope's mule, that keeps her kick for seven years."

I tried for a long time to find out the source of that proverb, what that Papal mule might be, and that kick kept for seven years. No one here was able to give me any information on that subject, not even Francet Mamaï, my fife-player, who, however, has the whole legendary history of Provence at his finger-ends. Francet agrees with me that there is probably some old tradition of Provence behind it; but he has never heard it mentioned except in the proverb.

"You won't find that anywhere except in the Grasshoppers' Library," said the old fifer, with a laugh.

I thought the suggestion a good one, and as the Grasshoppers' Library is right at my door, I shut myself up there for a week.

It is a wonderful library, splendidly stocked, open to poets day and night, the attendants being little librarians with cymbals, who play for you all the time. I passed some delightful days there, and after a week of investigation—on my back—I ended by discovering what I wanted to know, that is to say, the story of my mule and of that famous kick stored up for seven years. The tale is a pretty one, although slightly ingenuous, and I am going to try to tell it to you as I read it yesterday morning in a manuscript of the colour of the weather, which had a pleasant smell of dry lavender, with long gossamer-threads for book-marks.

He who never saw Avignon in the time of the Popes has seen nothing. Never was there such a city for gaiety, life, animation, and a succession of fêtes. There were, from morning till night, processions, pilgrimages; streets strewn with flowers and carpeted with magnificent tapestries, cardinals arriving by the Rhône, with banners flying; gaily bedecked galleys, the soldiers of the Pope singing in Latin on the squares, and the bowls of mendicant friars; and then, from roof to cellar of the houses that crowded humming about the great Papal palace, like bees about their hive, there was the tick-tack of the lace-makers' looms, the rapid movement of the shuttles weaving gold thread for the vestments, the little hammers of the carvers of burettes, the keyboards being tuned at the lute-makers', the songs of the sempstresses; and, overhead, the clang of the bells, and always a tambourine or two jingling down by the bridge. For with us, when the common people are pleased, they must dance and dance; and as the streets in the city in those days were too narrow for the farandole, the fifes and the tambourines stationed themselves on Avignon Bridge, in the cool breezes from the Rhône; and there the people danced and danced, day and night. Ah! the happy days! the happy city! Halberds that did not wound, state prisons where they put wine to cool. No famine; no wars. That is how the Popes of the Comtat governed the people; that is why the people regretted them so bitterly.

¶

THERE was one especially, a good old fellow, whom they called Boniface. Ah! how many tears were shed in Avignon when he died! He was such a good-natured, affable prince! He laughed so heartily from the back of his mule! And when you passed him—though you were simply a poor little digger of madder, or the provost of the city—he would give you his blessing so courteously! He was a genuine Pope of Yvetot, but of a Provençal Yvetot, with a something shrewd in his laughter, a sprig of marjoram in his biretta, and never a sign

of a Jeanneton. The only Jeanneton that the old man had ever been known to have was his vineyard, a tiny vineyard which he had planted himself, three leagues from Avignon, among the myrtles of Château Neuf.

Every Sunday, after vespers, the excellent man went to pay court to it; and when he was there, seated in the warm sun, with his mule by his side and his cardinals lying at the foot of the stumps all about, then he would order a bottle of native wine opened, —that fine, ruby-coloured wine which was called afterwards the Château Neuf of the Popes,—and he would drink it in little sips, looking at his vineyard with a tender expression. Then, when the bottle was empty and the day drew to a close, he would return merrily to the city, followed by all his chapter; and when he rode over Avignon Bridge, through the drums and farandoles, his mule, stirred by the music, would fall into a little skipping amble, while he himself marked the time of the dance with his cap, which scandalised his cardinals terribly, but caused the people to say: "Ah! the kind prince! ah! the dear old Pope!"

Next to his vineyard at Château Neuf, the thing that the Pope loved best on earth was his mule. The good man fairly doted on the beast. Every night, before going to bed, he would go to see if his stable was securely fastened, if anything was lacking in the crib; and he never rose from the table until a huge bowl of wine *à la Française*, with plenty of sugar and spices, had been prepared under his own eye, which he carried to the mule himself, despite the comments of his cardinals. It should be said, too, that the beast was worth the trouble. It was a fine black mule, dappled with red, sure-footed, with a glossy coat, a broad, full rump; and she carried proudly her slender little head, all bedecked with plumes, and ribbons, and silver bells and streamers; and as gentle as an angel withal, with a mild eye and two long ears always in motion, which gave her a most amiable aspect. All Avignon respected her, and when she passed through the streets there was no attention which the people did not pay her; for they all knew that that was the best way to be in favour at court, and that, with her innocent look, the Pope's mule had led more than one to wealth; witness Tistet Védène and his wonderful adventures.

This Tistet Védène was in truth an impudent rascal, whom his father, Guy Védène, the gold-carver, had been obliged to turn out of his house, because he refused to do any work and led the apprentices astray. For six months he was seen dragging his jacket through all the gutters of Avignon, but principally in the neighbourhood of the Papal palace; for the rogue had had for a long while a scheme of his own about the Pope's mule, and you will see what a mischievous scheme it was.

One day, when his Holiness all alone was riding by the ramparts on his steed, behold my Tistet approaches him, and says, clasping his hands with an air of admiration:

"Ah! *mon Dieu!* what a fine mule you have, Holy Father! Just let me look at her. Ah! what a lovely mule, my Pope! the Emperor of Germany has not her like."

And he patted her and spoke softly to her, as to a maiden:

"Come, my jewel, my treasure, my pearl."

And the excellent Pope, deeply moved, said to himself:

"What a nice little fellow! How nice he is with my mule!"

And what do you suppose happened the next day? Tistet Védène exchanged his old yellow jacket for a fine lace alb, a violet silk hood, and shoes with buckles; and he entered the household of the Pope, to which only sons of nobles and nephews of cardinals had ever been admitted. That is what intrigue leads to! But Tistet Védène did not stop there. Once in the Pope's service, the rascal continued the game that had succeeded so well. Insolent with everybody else, he reserved his attention and care for the mule alone; and he was always to be seen in the courtyard of the palace, with a handful of oats or a bunch of clover, whose purple clusters he shook as he glanced at the Holy Father's balcony, as if he would say: "Look! for whom is this?" The result was that the excellent Pope finally, feeling that he was growing old, left it to him to look after the stable and to carry the mule her bowl of wine *à la Française*: which did not make the cardinals laugh.

¶

NOR the mule either—it did not make her laugh. Now, when the time for her wine arrived, she always saw five or six little clerks of the household enter her stable

and hastily bury themselves in the straw with their hoods and their lace; then, after a moment, a delicious odour of caramel and spices filled the stable, and Tistel Védène appeared, carefully carrying the bowl of wine *à la Française*. Then the poor beast's martyrdom began.

That perfumed wine which she loved so dearly, which kept her warm, which gave her wings, they had the fiendish cruelty to bring to her manger, to let her inhale it, and then, when her nostrils were full of it, off it went! the beautiful rose-coloured liquor disappeared down the throats of those young rogues. And if they had only contented themselves with stealing her wine! but all those little clerks were like devils when they had been drinking. One pulled her ears, another her tail; Quiquet mounted her back, Béluguet tried his cap on her head, and not one of the scamps reflected that with a sudden kick the excellent beast could have sent them all into the polar star, or even farther. But no! not for nothing is one the Pope's mule, the mule of benedictions and indulgences. Let the boys do what they would, she did not lose her temper, and she bore a grudge to Tistet Védène alone. But he—when she felt him behind her, her hoofs fairly itched, and in good sooth there was reason for it. That ne'er-do-well of a Tistet played her such cruel tricks! He conceived such fiendish ideas after drinking!

Would you believe that one day he took it into his head to make her go up with him into the belfry, way up to the highest point of the palace! And this that I am telling you is not a fable—two hundred thousand Provençals saw it. Just imagine the terror of that wretched beast, when, after twisting blindly about for an hour on a winding staircase, and climbing I know not how many stairs, she suddenly found herself on a platform dazzling with light; and a thousand feet below her, a whole fantastic Avignon, the stalls in the market no larger than walnuts, the Pope's soldiers in front of their barracks like red ants, and yonder, over a silver thread, a little microscopic bridge where the people danced and danced. Ah! the poor creature! what a panic! All the windows in the palace shook with the bray that she uttered.

"What's the matter? What are they doing to her?" cried the good Pope, rushing out upon the balcony.

"Ah! Holy Father, this is what's the matter! Your mule—*mon Dieu!* what will become of us—your mule has gone up into the belfry."

"All alone?"

"Yes, Holy Father, all alone. See! look up there. Don't you see the ends of her ears hanging over, like two swallows!"

"Merciful Heaven!" exclaimed the poor Pope, raising his eyes. "Why, she must have gone mad! Why, she will kill herself! Will you come down here, you wretched creature?"

Pécaïre! She would have asked nothing better than to have come down; but how? As to the staircase, that was not to be thought of; it is possible to go up such things; but in going down there is a chance to break one's legs a hundred times. And the poor mule was in despair; as she wandered about the platform with her great eyes filled with vertigo, she thought of Tistet Védene.

"Ah! You villain, if I escape, what a kick to-morrow morning!"

That idea of a kick restored a little of her courage; save for that, she could not have held out. At last they succeeded in taking her down; but it was a difficult task. They had to lower her in a litter, with ropes and a jack-screw. And you can imagine what a humiliation it was for the Pope's mule to be suspended at that height, swinging about with her hoofs in the air, like a butterfly at the end of a string. And all Avignon looking at her!

The wretched beast did not sleep that night. It seemed to her all the time that she was walking about on that infernal platform, with the city laughing below her; then she thought of that infamous Tistet Védène, and of the dainty kick that she proposed to give him in the morning. Ah! my friends, what a kick! they would see the smoke at Pampérigouste.

Now, while this pleasant reception was in store for him at the stable, what do you suppose Tistet Védène was doing? He was going down the Rhône, singing, on one of the Pope's galleys, on his way to the Court of Naples, with a party of young nobles whom the city sent every year to Queen Joanna, for training in diplomacy and in refined manners. Tistet was not of noble birth; but the Pope desired to reward him for the care he had bestowed upon his mule, and above all for the activity he had displayed during the day of rescue.

Imagine the mule's disappointment the next morning!

Ah! the villain! he suspected something!" she thought, as she shook her bells savagely; "but never mind, you scoundrel! you shall have it when you come back, that kick of yours; I will keep it for you!"

And she did keep it for him.

After Tistet's departure, the mule resumed her quiet mode of life and her former habits. No more Quiquet or Béluguet in her stable. The blissful days of wine *à la Française* had returned, and with them good humour, the long siestas, and the little dancing step when she crossed Avignon Bridge. Since her misfortune, however, she was always treated rather coldly in the city. People whispered together as she passed; the old folks shook their heads, and the children laughed as they pointed to the belfry. Even the worthy Pope himself had not his former confidence in his friend, and when he allowed himself to take a little nap on her back, on Sundays, when he returned from his vineyard, he always had this thought: "Suppose I should wake up on the platform up there!"

The mule saw that and she was unhappy over it, although she said nothing; but when the name of Tistet Védène was mentioned in her presence, her long ears quivered, and with a short laugh she would sharpen the iron of her little shoes on the pavement.

Seven years passed thus; and then, at the end of those seven years, Tistet Védène returned from the Court of Naples. His time there was not at an end; but he had learned that the Pope's chief mustard-bearer had died suddenly at Avignon, and as the office seemed to him a good one, he returned in great haste to apply for it.

When that schemer of a Védène entered the great hall of the palace, the Holy Father had difficulty in recognising him, he had grown so tall and so stout. It should be said also that the Pope had grown old, too, and that he could not see well without spectacles.

Tistet was not frightened.

"What? don't you recognise me, Holy Father? It is Tistet Védène."

"Védène?"

"Why yes, you know, the one who used to carry the French wine to your mule."

"Oh, yes! I remember. A good little fellow, that Tistet Védène! And what does he want of us now?"

"Oh! a mere nothing, Holy Father. I came to ask you—by the way—have you still your mule? And is she well? Good! —I came to ask you for the place of the chief mustard-bearer, who has just died."

"You, chief mustard-bearer! why, you are too young. How old are you?"

"Twenty years and two months, illustrious pontiff; just five years older than your mule. Ah! blessed palm of God! the excellent beast! If you only knew how I loved that mule! how I sighed for her in Italy!—Won't you let me see her?"

"Yes, my child, you shall see her," said the kind-hearted Pope, deeply touched. "And as you are so fond of the excellent beast, I propose that you shall live near her. From this day, I attach you to my person as chief mustard-bearer. My cardinals will make an outcry, but so much the worse! I am used to it. Come to us to-morrow, when vespers is done, and we will deliver the symbols of your office, in the presence of our chapter, and then—I will take you to see the mule, and you shall come to the vineyard with us both. Ha! ha!—Now go!"

If Tistet Védène was pleased when he left the great hall, I need not tell you how impatiently he awaited the ceremony of the morrow. Meanwhile, there was some one in the palace still happier than he and even more impatient; that was the mule. From the hour of Védène's return until vespers of the following day, the bloodthirsty creature did not cease stuffing herself with oats, and kicking at the wall with her hind feet. She, too, was preparing for the ceremony.

On the morrow, then, when vespers was at an end, Tistet Védène entered the courtyard of the Papal palace. All the high clergy were there, the cardinals in their red robes, the advocate of the devil in black velvet, the convent abbés with their little mitres, the churchwardens of the Saint-Agrico, the violet hoods of the household, the lower clergy, too, the Pope's soldiers in full uniform, the three brotherhoods of penitents, the hermits from Mount Ventoux with their fierce eyes, and the little clerk who walks behind them carrying the bell, the Flagellants naked to the waist, the red-faced sacristans in gowns like judges—all, yes, all, even to those who hand the holy-water, and he who lights and he who extinguishes the candles; not one was missing. Ah! it was a grand installation! Bells, fireworks, sunlight, music, and, as always, those mad tambourine-players leading the dance yonder on Avignon Bridge.

The Pope's Mule

When Védène appeared in the midst of the assemblage, his presence and his handsome face aroused a murmur of admiration. He was a magnificent Provençal, of the blonde type, with long hair curled at the ends and a small, unruly beard which resembled the shavings of fine metal from the graving-tool of his father the goldsmith. The report was current that the fingers of Queen Joanna had sometimes toyed with that light beard; and Sire de Védène had in truth the vain-glorious air and the distraught expression of men whom queens have loved. That day, to do honour to his nation, he had replaced his Neapolitan clothes by a jacket with a pink border *à la Provençale*, and in his hood floated a long plume of the Camargue ibis.

Immediately upon his entrance, the chief mustard-bearer bowed with a noble air, and walked toward the high dais, where the Pope awaited him, to deliver the symbols of his office: the spoon of yellow wood and the saffron-coloured coat. The mule was at the foot of the staircase, all saddled and ready to start for the vineyard. When he passed her, Tistet Védène smiled affably and stopped to pat her two or three times in a friendly way on the back, looking out of the corner of his eye to see if the Pope noticed him. The position was excellent. The mule let fly:

"There! take that, you villain! For seven years I have been keeping it for you!"

And she gave him a terrible kick, so terrible that the smoke of it was seen from far Pampérigouste, an eddying cloud of blond smoke in which fluttered an ibis-feather—all that remained of the ill-fated Tistet Védène!

A mule's kick is not ordinarily so disastrous; but she was a Papal mule; and then, think of it! she had kept it for him for seven years. There is no finer example of an ecclesiastical grudge.

Mind and Matter

"GOD bless my soul, sir!" exclaimed the Reverend Doctor Folliott, bursting, one fine May morning, into the breakfast-room at Crotchet Castle, "I am out of all patience with this march of mind. Here has my house been nearly burned down, by my cook taking it into her head to study hydrostatics, in a sixpenny-tract, published by the Steam Intellect Society, and written by a learned friend who is for doing all the world's business as well as his own, and is equally well qualified to handle every branch of human knowledge. I have a great abomination of this learned friend; as author, lawyer, politician, he is *triformis*, like Hecate; and in every one of his three forms he is *bifrons*, like Janus; the true Mr. Facing-both-ways of Vanity Fair. My cook must read his rubbish in bed; and as might naturally be expected, she dropped suddenly fast asleep, overturned the candle, and set the curtains in a blaze. Luckily the footman went into the room at the moment, in time to tear down the curtains and throw them into the chimney, and a pitcher of water on her nightcap extinguished her wick: she is a greasy subject, and would have burned like a short mould."—THOMAS LOVE PEACOCK.

THE blunders of youth are preferable to the triumphs of manhood, or the success of old age.—DISRAELI.

AS I like a young man in whom there is something of the old, so do I like an old man in whom is something of the young.—CICERO.

Fashion, Fops and Foibles

THERE is not so variable a thing in Nature as a lady's head-dress. ADDISON.

Two things, completely opposite to each other, captivate us equally—habit and novelty. LA BRUYÈRE.

A PRETTY man is a paltry man. MARTIAL.

A MAN of fashion never has recourse to proverbs and vulgar aphorisms. LORD CHESTERFIELD.

WHILE the world lasts, fashion will continue to lead it by the nose. COWPER.

LOVE'S special lesson is to please the eye. CHAPMAN.

WE praise and blame most things simply because it is the fashion to praise or blame them. LA ROCHEFOUCAULD.

We know, Mr. Weller, we, who are men of the world, that a good uniform must work its way with the women, sooner or later. DICKENS.

IN almost every age, whether in literature or art, if a thoroughly wrong idea or fashion or manner becomes in vogue, it is admired. SCHOPENHAUER.

THOSE who make their dress a principal part of themselves will, in general, become of no more value than their dress. HAZLITT.

THIS is our chief bane, that we live not according to the light of reason, but after the fashion of others. SENECA.

THE world must be getting old, I think; it dresses so very soberly now. J. K. JEROME.

THE fashion wears out more apparel than the man. SHAKESPEARE.

I LOVE that beauty should go beautifully. TENNYSON.

BRITONS ever will be slaves when fashion is in the case. C. H. SPURGEON.

DRESS being a compliment we owe to society, you should not show a remissness therein, unless you would be thought a sloven. REV. J. TRUSLER.

TAKE the course opposite to custom and you will almost always do well. ROUSSEAU.

THE despotism of custom is everywhere the standing hindrance to human advancement. J. S. MILL.

WOE to every mortal, and especially in these days, who affects singularity in order to be a personage. VOLTAIRE.

WHAT you do not want is dear at a farthing. CATO.

As if a woman of education bought things because she wanted them! Quality always distinguishes itself, and therefore as the mechanic people buy things because they have occasion for 'em, you see women of rank always buy things because they have not occasion for 'em. SIR J. VANBRUGH.

IT'S the life o' an auld hat to be weel cockit. SCOTTISH PROVERB.

The Seed of McCoy

"The great mind knows the power of gentleness"

By JACK LONDON

THE *Pyrenees*, her iron sides pressed low in the water by her cargo of wheat, rolled sluggishly, and made it easy for the man who was climbing aboard from out a tiny outrigger canoe. As his eyes came level with the rail, so that he could see inboard, it seemed to him that he saw a dim, almost indiscernible haze. It was more like an illusion, like a blurring film that had spread abruptly over his eyes. He felt an inclination to brush it away, and the same instant he thought that he was growing old and that it was time to send to San Francisco for a pair of spectacles.

As he came over the rail he cast a glance aloft at the tall masts, and, next, at the pumps. They were not working. There seemed nothing the matter with the big ship, and he wondered why she had hoisted the signal of distress. He thought of his happy islanders and hoped it was not disease. Perhaps the ship was short of water or provisions. He shook hands with the captain, whose gaunt face and care-worn eyes made no secret of the trouble, whatever it was. At the same moment the newcomer was aware of a faint, indefinable smell. It seemed like that of burnt bread, but different.

He glanced curiously about him. Twenty feet away a weary-faced sailor was caulking the deck. As his eye lingered on the man, he saw suddenly arise from under his hands a faint spiral of haze that curled and twisted and was gone. By now he had reached the deck. His bare feet were pervaded by a dull warmth that quickly penetrated the thick calluses. He knew now the nature of the ship's distress. His eyes roved swiftly forward, where the full crew of weary-faced sailors regarded him eagerly. The glance from his liquid brown eyes swept over them like a benediction, soothing them, wrapping them about as in the mantle of a great peace. "How long has she been afire, captain?" he asked in a voice so gentle and unperturbed that it was as the cooing of a dove.

At first the captain felt the peace and content of it stealing in upon him; then the consciousness of all that he had gone through and was going through smote him, and he was resentful. By what right did this ragged beach-comber, in dungaree trousers and a cotton shirt, suggest such a thing as peace and content to him and his overwrought, exhausted soul? The captain did not reason this; it was the unconscious process of emotion that caused his resentment.

"Fifteen days," he answered shortly. "Who are you?"

"My name is McCoy," came the answer in tones that breathed tenderness and compassion.

"I mean, are you the pilot?"

McCoy passed the benediction of his gaze over the tall, heavy-shouldered man with the haggard, unshaven face who had joined the captain.

"I am as much a pilot as anybody," was McCoy's answer. "We are all pilots here, captain, and I know every inch of these waters."

But the captain was impatient.

"What I want is some of the authorities. I want to talk with them, and blame quick."

"Then I'll do just as well."

Again that insidious suggestion of peace, and his ship a raging furnace beneath his feet! The captain's eyebrows lifted impatiently and nervously, and his fist clenched as if he were about to strike a blow with it.

"Who in hell are you?" he demanded.

"I am the chief magistrate," was the reply in a voice that was still the softest and gentlest imaginable.

The tall, heavy-shouldered man broke out in a harsh laugh that was partly amusement, but mostly hysterical. Both he and the captain regarded McCoy with incredulity and amazement. That this barefooted beach-comber should possess such high-sounding dignity was inconceivable. His cotton shirt, unbuttoned, exposed a grizzled chest and the fact that there was no undershirt beneath. A worn straw hat failed to

hide the ragged grey hair. Halfway down his chest descended an untrimmed patriarchal beard. In any slop-shop, two shillings would have outfitted him complete as he stood before them.

"Any relation to the McCoy of the *Bounty?*" the captain asked.

"He was my great-grandfather."

"Oh," the captain said, then bethought himself. "My name is Davenport, and this is my first mate, Mr. Konig."

They shook hands.

"And now to business." The captain spoke quickly, the urgency of a great haste pressing his speech. "We've been on fire for over two weeks. She's ready to break all hell loose any moment. That's why I held for Pitcairn. I want to beach her, or scuttle her, and save the hull."

"Then you made a mistake, captain," said McCoy. "You should have slacked away for Mangareva. There's a beautiful beach there, in a lagoon where the water is like a mill-pond."

"But we're here, ain't we?" the first mate demanded. "That's the point. We're here, and we've got to do something."

McCoy shook his head kindly.

"You can do nothing here. There is no beach. There isn't even anchorage."

"Gammon!" said the mate. "Gammon!" he repeated loudly as the captain signalled him to be more soft-spoken. "You can't tell me that sort of stuff. Where d'ye keep your own boats, hey—your schooner, or cutter, or whatever you have? Hey? Answer me that."

McCoy smiled as gently as he spoke. His smile was a caress, an embrace that surrounded the tired mate and sought to draw him into the quietude and rest of McCoy's tranquil soul.

"We have no schooner or cutter," he replied. "And we carry our canoes to the top of the cliff."

"You've got to show me," snorted the mate. "How d'ye get around to the other islands, heh? Tell me that."

"We don't get around. As governor of Pitcairn, I sometimes go. When I was younger I was away a great deal—sometimes on the trading schooners, but mostly on the missionary brig. But she's gone now, and we depend on passing vessels. Sometimes we have had as high as six calls in one year. At other times, a year, and even longer, has gone by without one passing ship. Yours is the first in seven months."

"And you mean to tell me——" the mate began.

But Captain Davenport interfered.

"Enough of this. We're losing time. What is to be done, Mr. McCoy?"

The old man turned his brown eyes, sweet as a woman's, shoreward, and both captain and mate followed his gaze around from the lonely rock of Pitcairn to the crew clustering forward and waiting anxiously for the announcement of a decision. McCoy did not hurry. He thought smoothly and slowly, step by step, with the certitude of a mind that was never vexed or outraged by life.

"The wind is light now," he said finally. "There is a heavy current setting to the westward."

"That's what made us fetch to leeward," the captain interrupted, desiring to vindicate his seamanship.

"Yes, that is what fetched you to leeward," McCoy went on. "Well, you can't work up against this current to-day. And if you did, there is no beach. Your ship will be a total loss."

He paused, and captain and mate looked despair at each other.

"But I will tell you what you can do. The breeze will freshen to-night around midnight—see those tails of clouds and that thickness to windward, beyond the point there? That's where she'll come from, out of the south-east, hard. It is three hundred miles to Mangareva. Square away for it. There is a beautiful bed for your ship there."

The mate shook his head.

"Come into the cabin and we'll look at the chart," said the captain.

McCoy found a stifling, poisonous atmosphere in the pent cabin. Stray waftures of invisible gases bit his eyes and made them sting. The deck was hotter, almost unbearably hot to his bare feet. The sweat poured out of his body. He looked almost with apprehension about him. This malignant, internal heat was astounding. It was a marvel that the cabin did not burst into flames. He had a feeling as of being in a huge bake-oven where the heat might at any moment increase tremendously and shrivel him up like a blade of grass.

As he lifted one foot and rubbed the hot sole against the leg of his trousers, the mate laughed in a savage, snarling fashion.

"The ante-room of hell," he said. "Hell herself is right down there under your feet."

"It's hot!" McCoy cried involuntarily,

mopping his face with a bandana handkerchief.

" Here's Mangareva," the captain said, bending over the table and pointing to a black speck in the midst of the white blankness of the chart. " And here, in between, is another island. Why not run for that ? "

McCoy did not look at the chart.

" That's Crescent Island," he answered. " It is uninhabited, and it is only two or three feet above water. Lagoon, but no entrance. No, Mangareva is the nearest place for your purpose."

" Mangareva it is, then," said Captain Davenport, interrupting the mate's growling objection. " Call the crew aft, Mr. Konig."

The sailors obeyed, shuffling wearily along the deck and painfully endeavouring to make haste. Exhaustion was evident in every movement. The cook came out of his galley to hear, and the cabin-boy hung about near him.

When Captain Davenport had explained the situation and announced his intention of running for Mangareva, an uproar broke out. Against a background of throaty rumbling arose inarticulate cries of rage, with here and there a distinct curse, or word, or phrase. A shrill Cockney voice soared and dominated for a moment, crying : " Gawd ! After bein' in 'ell for fifteen days —an' now 'e wants us to sail this floatin' 'ell to sea again ! "

The captain could not control them, but McCoy's gentle presence seemed to rebuke and calm them, and the muttering and cursing died away, until the full crew, save here and there an anxious face directed at the captain, yearned dumbly toward the green-clad peaks of Pitcairn.

Soft as a spring zephyr was the voice of McCoy :

" Captain, I thought I heard some of them say they were starving."

" Aye," was the answer, " and so we are. I've had a sea-biscuit and a spoonful of salmon in the last two days. We're on whack. You see, when we discovered the fire, we battened down immediately to suffocate the fire. And then we found how little food there was in the pantry. But it was too late. We didn't dare break out the lazarette. Hungry ? I'm just as hungry as they are."

He spoke to the men again, and again the throat-rumbling and cursing arose, their faces convulsed and animal-like with rage. The second and third mates had joined the captain, standing behind him at the break of the poop. Their faces were set and expressionless ; they seemed bored, more than anything else, by this mutiny of the crew. Captain Davenport glanced questioningly at his first mate, and that person merely shrugged his shoulders.

" You see," the captain said to McCoy, " you can't compel sailors to leave the safe land and go to sea on a burning vessel. She has been their floating coffin for over two weeks now. They are worked out, and starved out, and they've got enough of her. We'll beat up for Pitcairn."

¶

BUT the wind was light, the *Pyrenees*' bottom was foul, and she could not beat upagainst the strong westerly current. At the end of two hours she had lost three miles. The sailors worked eagerly, as if by main strength they could compel the *Pyrenees* against the adverse elements. But steadily, port tack and starboard tack, she sagged off to the westward. The captain paced restlessly up and down, pausing occasionally to survey the vagrant smoke-wisps and to trace them back to the portions of the deck from which they sprang. The carpenter was engaged constantly in attempting to locate such places, and, when he succeeded, in caulking them tighter and tighter.

" Well, what do you think ? " the captain finally asked McCoy, who was watching the carpenter with all a child's interest and curiosity in his eyes.

McCoy looked shoreward, where the land was disappearing in the thickening haze.

" I think it would be better to square away for Mangareva. With that breeze that is coming, you'll be there to-morrow evening."

" But what if the fire breaks out ? It is liable to do it any moment."

" Have your boats ready in the falls. The same breeze will carry your boats to Mangareva if the ship burns out from under."

Captain Davenport debated for a moment, and then McCoy heard the question he had not wanted to hear, but which he knew was surely coming.

" I have no chart of Mangareva. On the general chart it is only a fly-speck. I would not know where to look for the

entrance into the lagoon. Will you come along and pilot her in for me?"

McCoy's serenity was unbroken.

"Yes, captain," he said, with the same quiet unconcern with which he would have accepted an invitation to dinner; "I'll go with you to Mangareva."

Again the crew was called aft, and the captain spoke to them from the break of the poop.

"We've tried to work her up, but you see how we've lost ground. She's setting off in a two-knot current. This gentleman is the Honourable McCoy, Chief Magistrate and Governor of Pitcairn Island. He will come along with us to Mangareva. So you see the situation is not so dangerous. He would not make such an offer if he thought he was going to lose his life. Besides, whatever risk there is, if he of his own free will come on board and take it, we can do no less. What do you say for Mangareva?"

This time there was no uproar. McCoy's presence, the surety and calm that seemed to radiate from him, had had its effect. They conferred with one another in low voices. There was little urging. They were virtually unanimous, and they shoved the Cockney out as their spokesman. That worthy was overwhelmed with consciousness of the heroism of himself and his mates, and with flashing eyes he cried:

"By Gawd! if 'e will, we will!"

The crew mumbled its assent and started forward.

"One moment, captain," McCoy said, as the other was turning to give orders to the mate. "I must go ashore first."

Mr. Konig was thunderstruck, staring at McCoy as if he were a madman.

"Go ashore!" the captain cried. "What for? It will take you three hours to get there in your canoe."

McCoy measured the distance of the land away and nodded.

"Yes; it is six now. I won't get ashore till nine. The people cannot be assembled earlier than ten. As the breeze freshens up to-night, you can begin to work up against it, and pick me up at daylight to-morrow morning."

"In the name of reason and common sense," the captain burst forth, "what do you want to assemble the people for? Don't you realise that my ship is burning beneath me?"

McCoy was as placid as a summer sea, and the other's anger produced not the slightest ripple upon it.

"Yes, captain," he cooed in his dovelike voice, "I do realise that your ship is burning. That is why I am going with you to Mangareva. But I must get permission to go with you. It is our custom. It is an important matter when the governor leaves the island. The people's interests are at stake, and so they have the right to vote their permission or refusal. But they will give it, I know that."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure."

"Then if you know they will give it, why bother with getting it? Think of the delay—a whole night."

"It is our custom," was the imperturbable reply. "Also, I am the governor, and I must make arrangements for the conduct of the island during my absence."

"But it is only a twenty-four-hour run to Mangareva," the captain objected. "Suppose it took you six times as long as that to return to windward; that would bring you back by the end of a week."

McCoy smiled his large, benevolent smile.

"Very few vessels come to Pitcairn, and when they do, they are usually from San Francisco or from around the Horn. I shall be fortunate if I get back in six months. I may be away a year, and I may have to go to San Francisco in order to find a vessel that will bring me back. My father once left Pitcairn to be gone three months, and two years passed before he could get back. Then, too, you are short of food. If you have to take to the boats, and the weather comes up bad, you may be days in reaching land. I can bring off two canoe loads of food in the morning. Dried bananas will be best. As the breeze freshens, you beat up against it. The nearer you are, the bigger loads I can bring off. Good-bye."

He held out his hand. The captain shook it, and was reluctant to let go. He seemed to cling to it as a drowning sailor clings to a life-buoy.

"How do I know you will come back in the morning?" he asked.

"Yes, that's it!" cried the mate. "How do we know but what he's skinning out to save his own hide?"

McCoy did not speak. He looked at them sweetly and benignantly, and it seemed to them that they received a message from his tremendous certitude of soul.

The captain released his hand, and, with a last sweeping glance that embraced the

crew in its benediction, McCoy went over the rail and descended into his canoe.

¶

THE wind freshened, and the *Pyrenees*, despite the foulness of her bottom, won half a dozen miles away from the westerly current. At daylight, with Pitcairn three miles to windward, Captain Davenport made out two canoes coming off to him. Again McCoy clambered up the side and dropped over the rail to the hot deck. He was followed by many packages of dried bananas, each package wrapped in dry leaves.

"Now, captain, swing the yards and drive for dear life. You see, I am no navigator," he explained a few minutes later, as he stood by the captain aft, the latter with gaze wandering from aloft to overside as he estimated the *Pyrenees'* speed. "You must fetch her to Mangareva. When you have picked up the land, then I will pilot her in. What do you think she is making?"

"Eleven," Captain Davenport answered with a final glance at the water rushing past.

"Eleven. Let me see, if she keeps up that gait, we'll sight Mangareva between eight and nine o'clock to-morrow morning. I'll have her on the beach by ten, or by eleven at latest. And then your troubles will be all over."

It almost seemed to the captain that the blissful moment had already arrived, such was the persuasive convincingness of McCoy. Captain Davenport had been under the fearful strain of navigating his burning ship for over two weeks, and he was beginning to feel that he had had enough.

A heavier flaw of wind struck the back of his neck and whistled by his ears. He measured the weight of it, and looked quickly overside.

"The wind is making all the time," he announced. "The old girl's doing nearer twelve than eleven right now. If this keeps up, we'll be shortening down to-night."

All day the *Pyrenees*, carrying her load of living fire tore across the foaming sea. By nightfall, royals and topgallant-sails were in, and she flew on into the darkness, with great, crested seas roaring after her. The auspicious wind had had its effect, and fore and aft a visible brightening was apparent. In the second dog-watch some careless soul started a song, and by eight bells the whole crew was singing.

Captain Davenport had his blankets brought up and spread on top the house.

"I've forgotten what sleep is," he explained to McCoy. "I'm all in. But give me a call at any time you think necessary."

At three in the morning he was aroused by a gentle tugging at his arm. He sat up quickly, bracing himself against the skylight, stupid yet from his heavy sleep. The wind was thrumming its war-song in the rigging, and a wild sea was buffeting the *Pyrenees*. Amidships she was wallowing first one rail under and then the other, flooding the waist more often than not. McCoy was shouting something he could not hear. He reached out, clutched the other by the shoulder, and drew him close so that his own ear was close to the other's lips.

"It's three o'clock," came McCoy's voice, still retaining its dovelike quality, but curiously muffled, as if from a long way off. "We've run two hundred and fifty. Crescent Island is only thirty miles away, somewhere there dead ahead. There's no lights on it. If we keep running, we'll pile up, and lose ourselves as well as the ship."

RONDEL

WHEN the white almond sheds its snow
Upon the swelling springtide earth,
That glories in the year's new birth,
Then does my heart awake to know
A rosy Cupid's bending bow;
While I forget the winter's dearth,
When the white almond sheds its snow
Upon the swelling springtide earth.

Your two grey eyes, with love they glow—
If dewed with tears, or bright with mirth.
The stars embracing heaven's girth
Cannot outshine our joy below,
When the white almond sheds its snow.

WILFRED GAVIN.

"What d'ye think—heave to?"

"Yes; heave to till daylight. It will only put us back four hours."

So the *Pyrenees*, with her cargo of fire, was hove to, biting the teeth of the gale, and fighting and smashing the pounding seas. She was a shell, filled with a conflagration, and on the outside of the shell, clinging precariously, the little motes of men, by pull and haul, helped her in the battle.

"It is most unusual, this gale," McCoy told the captain, in the lee of the cabin. "By rights there should be no gale at this time of the year. But everything about the weather has been unusual. There has been a stoppage of the trades, and now it's howling right out of the trade quarter." He waved his hand into the darkness, as if his vision could dimly penetrate for hundreds of miles. "It is off to the westward. There is something big making off there somewhere—a hurricane or something. We're lucky to be so far to the eastward. But this is only a little blow," he added. "It can't last. I can tell you that much."

By daylight the gale had eased down to normal. But daylight revealed a new danger. It had come on thick. The sea was covered by a fog, or, rather, by a pearly mist that was fog-like in density in so far as it obstructed vision, but that was no more than a film on the sea, for the sun shot it through and filled it with a glowing radiance.

The deck of the *Pyrenees* was making more smoke than on the preceding day, and the cheerfulness of officers and crew had vanished. In the lee of the galley the cabin-boy could be heard whimpering. It was his first voyage, and the fear of death was at his heart. The captain wandered about like a lost soul, nervously chewing his moustache, scowling, unable to make up his mind what to do.

"What do you think?" he asked, pausing by the side of McCoy, who was making a breakfast off fried bananas and a mug of water.

McCoy finished the last banana, drained the mug, and looked slowly around. In his eyes was a smile of tenderness as he said:

"Well, captain, we might as well drive as burn. Your decks are not going to hold out for ever. They are hotter this morning. You haven't a pair of shoes I can wear? It is getting uncomfortable for my bare feet."

The *Pyrenees* shipped two heavy seas as she was swung off and put once more before it, and the first mate expressed a desire to have all that water down in the hold, if only it could be introduced without taking off the hatches. McCoy ducked his head into the binnacle and watched the course set.

"I'd hold her up some more, captain," he said. "She's been making drift when hove to."

"I've set it to a point higher already," was the answer. "Isn't that enough?"

"I'd make it two points, captain. This bit of a blow kicked that westerly current ahead faster than you imagine."

Captain Davenport compromised on a point and a half, and then went aloft, accompanied by McCoy and the first mate, to keep a look-out for land. Sail had been made, so that the *Pyrenees* was doing ten knots. The following sea was dying down rapidly. There was no break in the pearly fog, and by ten o'clock Captain Davenport was growing nervous. All hands were at their stations, ready, at the first warning of land ahead, to spring like fiends to the task of bringing the *Pyrenees* up on the wind. That land ahead, a surf-washed outer reef would be perilously close when it revealed itself in such a fog.

Another hour passed. The three watchers aloft stared intently into the pearly radiance.

"What if we miss Mangareva?" Captain Davenport asked abruptly.

McCoy, without shifting his gaze, answered softly:

"Why, let her drive, captain. That is all we can do. All the Paumotus are before us. We can drive for a thousand miles through reefs and atolls. We are bound to fetch up somewhere."

"Then drive it is." Captain Davenport evidenced his intention of descending to the deck. "We've missed Mangareva. God knows where the next land is. I wish I'd held up that other half-point," he confessed a moment later. "This cursed current plays the devil with a navigator."

"The old navigators called the Paumotus the Dangerous Archipelago," McCoy said when they had partly regained the poop. "This very current was partly responsible for that name."

"I was talking with a sailor chap in Sydney, once," said Mr. Konig. "He'd been trading in the Paumotus. He told me insurance was eighteen per cent. Is that right?"

McCoy smiled and nodded.

"Except that they don't insure," he

explained. "The owners write off twenty per cent. of the cost of their schooners each year."

"My God!" Captain Davenport groaned. "That makes the life of a schooner only five years!" He shook his head sadly, murmuring, "Bad waters: bad waters!"

Again they went into the cabin to consult the big general chart; but the poisonous vapours drove them coughing and gasping on deck.

"Here is Moerenhout Island." Captain Davenport pointed it out on the chart, which he had spread on the house. "It can't be more than a hundred miles to leeward."

"A hundred and ten." McCoy shook his head doubtfully. "It might be done, but it is very difficult. I might beach her, and then, again, I might put her on the reef. A bad place, a very bad place."

"We'll take the chance," was Captain Davenport's decision, as he set about working out the course.

Sail was shortened early in the afternoon, to avoid running past in the night; and in the second dog-watch the crew manifested its regained cheerfulness. Land was so very near and their troubles would be over in the morning.

¶

BUT morning broke clear, with a blazing tropic sun. The south-east trade had swung around to the eastward, and was driving the *Pyrenees* through the water at an eight-knot clip. Captain Davenport worked up his dead reckoning, allowing generously for drift, and announced Moerenhout Island to be not more than ten miles off. The *Pyrenees* sailed the ten miles; she sailed ten miles more; and the lookouts at the three mastheads saw naught but the naked, sun-washed sea.

"But the land is there, I tell you," Captain Davenport shouted to them from the poop.

McCoy smiled soothingly, but the captain glared about him like a madman, fetched his sextant, and took a chronometer sight.

"I knew I was right," he almost shouted, when he had worked up the observation. "Twenty-one, fifty-five, south; one-thirty-six, two, west. There you are. We're eight miles to windward yet. What did you make it out, Mr. Konig?"

The first mate glanced at his own figures, and said in a low voice:

"Twenty-one, fifty-five all right; but my longitude's one-thirty-six, forty-eight. That puts us considerably to leeward——"

But Captain Davenport ignored his figures with so contemptuous a silence as to make Mr. Konig grit his teeth and curse savagely under his breath.

"Keep her off," the captain ordered the man at the wheel. "Three points—steady there, as she goes!"

Then he returned to his figures and worked them over. The sweat poured from his face. He chewed his moustache, his lips, and his pencil, staring at the figures as a man might at a ghost. Suddenly, with a fierce, muscular outburst, he crumpled the scribbled paper in his fist and crushed it under foot. Mr. Konig grinned vindictively and turned away, while Captain Davenport leaned against the cabin and for half an hour spoke no word, contenting himself with gazing to leeward with an expression of musing hopelessness on his face.

"Mr. McCoy," he broke silence abruptly. "The chart indicates a group of islands, but not how many, off there to the north'ard, or nor'-nor'-westward, about forty miles—the Acteon Islands. What about them?"

"There are four, all low," McCoy answered. "First, to the south-east is Matueri—no people, no entrance to the lagoon. Then comes Tenarunga. There used to be about a dozen people there, but they may be all gone now. Anyway, there is no entrance for a ship—only a boat entrance, with a fathom of water. Vehauga and Teua-raro are the other two. No entrances, no people, very low. There is no bed for the *Pyrenees* in that group. She would be a total wreck,"

"Listen to that!" Captain Davenport was frantic. "No people! No entrances! What in the devil are islands good for?

"Well, then," he barked suddenly, like an excited terrier, "the chart gives a whole mess of islands off to the nor'west. What about them? What one has an entrance where I can lay my ship?"

McCoy calmly considered. He did not refer to the chart. All these islands, reefs, shoals, lagoons, entrances, and distances were marked on the chart of his memory. He knew them as the city dweller knows his buildings, streets, and alleys.

"Papakena and Vanavana are off there to the westward, or west-nor'-westward, a hundred miles, and a bit more," he said. "One is uninhabited, and I heard that the

people on the other had gone off to Cadmus Island. Anyway, neither lagoon has an entrance. Ahunui is another hundred miles on to the nor'-west. No entrance, no people."

"Well, forty miles beyond them are two islands?" Captain Davenport queried, raising his head from the chart.

McCoy shook his head.

"Paros and Manuhungi—no entrances, no people. Nengo-Nengo is forty miles beyond them, in turn, and it has no people and no entrance. But there is Hao Island. It is just the place. The lagoon is thirty miles long and five miles wide. There are plenty of people. You can usually find water. And any ship in the world can go through the entrance."

He ceased, and gazed solicitously at Captain Davenport, who, bending over the chart with a pair of dividers in hand, had just emitted a low groan.

"Is there any lagoon with an entrance anywhere nearer than Hao Island?" he asked.

"No, captain; that is the nearest."

"Well, it's three hundred and forty miles." Captain Davenport was speaking very slowly, with decision. "I won't risk the responsibility of all these lives. I'll wreck her on the Acteons. And she's a good ship, too," he added regretfully, after altering the course, this time making more allowance than ever for the westerly current.

An hour later the sky was overcast. The south-east trade still held, but the ocean was a checker-board of squalls.

"We'll be there by one o'clock," Captain Davenport announced confidently—"by two o'clock at the outside. McCoy, you put her ashore on the one where the people are."

The sun did not appear again, nor, at one o'clock, was any land to be seen. Captain Davenport looked astern at the *Pyrenees'* canting wake.

"Good Lord!" he cried. "An easterly current! Look at that!"

Mr. Konig was incredulous. McCoy was non-committal, though he said that in the Paumotus there was no reason why it should not be an easterly current. A few minutes later a squall robbed the *Pyrenees* temporarily of all her wind, and she was left rolling heavily in the trough.

"Where's that deep lead? Over with it, you there!" Captain Davenport held the lead-line and watched it sag off to the north-east. "There, look at that! Take hold of it for yourself."

McCoy and the mate tried it, and felt the line thrumming and vibrating savagely to the grip of the tidal stream.

"A four-knot current," said Mr. Konig.

"An easterly current instead of a westerly," said Captain Davenport, glaring accusingly at McCoy, as if to cast the blame for it upon him.

"That is one of the reasons, captain, for insurance being eighteen per cent. in these waters," McCoy answered cheerfully. "You never can tell. The currents are always changing. There was a man who wrote books, I forget his name, in the yacht *Casco*. He missed Takaroa by thirty miles and fetched Tikei, all because of the shifting currents. You are up to windward now, and you'd better keep off a few points."

"But how much has this current set me?" the captain demanded irately. "How am I to know how much to keep off?"

"I don't know, captain," McCoy said with great gentleness.

The wind returned, and the *Pyrenees*, her deck smoking and shimmering in the bright grey light, ran off dead to leeward. Then she worked back, port tack and starboard tack, crisscrossing her track, combing the sea for the Acteon Islands, which the masthead lookouts failed to sight.

Captain Davenport was beside himself. His rage took the form of sullen silence, and he spent the afternoon in pacing the poop or leaning against the weather-shrouds. At nightfall, without even consulting McCoy, he squared away and headed into the north-west. Mr. Konig, surreptitiously consulting chart and binnacle, and McCoy, openly and innocently consulting the binnacle, knew that they were running for Hao Island. By midnight the squalls ceased, and the stars came out. Captain Davenport was cheered by the promise of a clear day.

"I'll get an observation in the morning," he told McCoy, "though what my latitude is, is a puzzler. But I'll use the Sumner method and settle that. Do you know the Sumner line?"

And thereupon he explained it in detail to McCoy.

The day proved clear, the trade blew steadily out of the east, and the *Pyrenees* just as steadily logged her nine knots. Both the captain and mate worked out the position on a Sumner line, and agreed, and at noon

agreed again, and verified the morning sights by the noon sights.

"Another twenty-four hours and we'll be there," Captain Davenport assured McCoy. "It's a miracle the way the old girl's decks hold out. But they can't last. They can't last. Look at the smoke, more and more every day. Yet it was a tight deck to begin with, fresh-caulked in 'Frisco. I was surprised when the fire first broke out and we battened down. Look at that!"

He broke off to gaze with dropped jaw at a spiral of smoke that coiled and twisted in the lee of the mizzen mast twenty feet above the deck.

"Now, how did that get there?" he demanded indignantly.

Beneath it there was no smoke. Crawling up from the deck, sheltered from the wind by the mast, by some freak it took form and visibility at that height. It writhed away from the mast, and for a moment overhung the captain like some threatening portent. The next moment the wind whisked it away, and the captain's jaw returned to place.

"As I was saying, when we first battened down, I was surprised. It was a tight deck, yet it leaked smoke like a sieve. And we've caulked and caulked ever since. There must be tremendous pressure underneath to drive so much smoke through."

¶

THAT afternoon the sky became overcast again, and squally, drizzly weather set in. The wind shifted back and forth between south-east and north-east, and at midnight the *Pyrenees* was caught aback by a sharp squall from the south-west, from which point the wind continued to blow intermittently.

"We won't make Hao until ten or eleven," Captain Davenport complained at seven in the morning, when the fleeting promise of the sun had been erased by hazy cloud masses in the eastern sky. And the next moment he was plaintively demanding, "And what are the currents doing?"

Lookouts at the mastheads could report no land, and the day passed in drizzling calms and violent squalls. By nightfall a heavy sea began to make from the west. The barometer had fallen to 29.50. There was no wind, and still the ominous sea continued to increase. Soon the *Pyrenees* was rolling madly in the huge waves that marched in an unending procession from out of the darkness of the west. Sail was shortened as fast as both watches could work, and, when the tired crew had finished, its grumbling and complaining voices, peculiarly animal-like and menacing, could be heard in the darkness. Once the starboard watch was called aft to lash down and make secure, and the men openly advertised their sullenness and unwillingness. Every slow movement was a protest and a threat. The atmosphere was moist and sticky like mucilage, and in the absence of wind all hands seemed to pant and gasp for air. The sweat stood out on faces and bare arms, and Captain Davenport for one, his face more gaunt and care-worn than ever, and his eyes troubled and staring, was oppressed by a feeling of impending calamity.

"It's off to the westward," McCoy said encouragingly. "At worst, we'll be only on the edge of it."

But Captain Davenport refused to be comforted, and by the light of a lantern read up the chapter in his *Epitome* that related to the strategy of shipmasters in cyclonic storms. From somewhere amidships the silence was broken by a low whimpering from the cabin-boy.

"Oh, shut up!" Captain Davenport yelled suddenly and with such force as to startle every man on board and to frighten the offender into a wild wail of terror.

"Mr. Konig," the captain said in a voice that trembled with rage and nerves, "will you kindly step for'ard and stop that brat's mouth with a deck mop?"

But it was McCoy who went forward, and in a few minutes had the boy comforted and asleep.

Shortly before daybreak the first breath of air began to move from out the south-east, increasing swiftly to a stiff and stiffer breeze. All hands were on deck waiting for what might be behind it.

"We're all right now, captain," said McCoy, standing close to his shoulder. "The hurricane is to the west'ard, and we are south of it. This breeze is the in-suck. It won't blow any harder. You can begin to put sail on her."

"But what's the good? Where shall I sail? This is the second day without observations, and we should have sighted Hao Island yesterday morning. Which way does it bear—north, south, east, or what? Tell me that, and I'll make sail in a jiffy."

"I am no navigator, captain," McCoy said in his mild way.

"I used to think I was one," was the retort, "before I got into these Paumotus."

At mid-day the cry of "Breakers ahead!" was heard from the lookout. The *Pyrenees* was kept off, and sail after sail was loosed and sheeted home. The *Pyrenees* was sliding through the water and fighting a current that threatened to set her down upon the breakers. Officers and men were working like mad, cook and cabin-boy, Captain Davenport himself, and McCoy all lending a hand. It was a close shave. It was a low shoal, a bleak and perilous place over which the seas broke unceasingly, where no man could live, and on which not even sea-birds could rest. The *Pyrenees* was swept within a hundred yards of it before the wind carried her clear, and at this moment the panting crew, its work done, burst out in a torrent of curses upon the head of McCoy—of McCoy who had come on board, and proposed the run to Mangareva, and lured them all away from the safety of Pitcairn Island to certain destruction in this baffling and terrible stretch of sea. But McCoy's tranquil soul was undisturbed. He smiled at them with simple and gracious benevolence, and, somehow, the exalted goodness of him seemed to penetrate to their dark and sombre souls, shaming them, and from very shame stilling the curses vibrating in their throats.

"Bad waters! bad waters!" Captain Davenport was murmuring as his ship forged clear; but he broke off abruptly to gaze at the shoal which should have been dead astern, but which was already on the *Pyrenees*' weather-quarter and working up rapidly to windward.

He sat down and buried his face in his hands. And the first mate saw, and McCoy saw, and the crew saw, what he had seen. South of the shoal an easterly current had set them down upon it; north of the shoal an equally swift westerly current had clutched the ship and was sweeping her away.

"I've heard of these Paumotus before," the captain groaned, lifting his blanched face from his hands. "Captain Moyendale told me about them after losing his ship on them. And I laughed at him behind his back. God forgive me, I laughed at him. What shoal is that?" he broke off, to ask McCoy.

"I don't know, captain."

"Why don't you know?"

"Because I never saw it before, and because I never heard of it. I do know that it is not charted. These waters have never been thoroughly surveyed."

"Then you don't know where we are?"

"No more than you do," McCoy said gently.

At four in the afternoon cocoanut-trees were sighted, apparently growing out of the water. A little later the low land of an atoll was raised above the sea.

"I know where we are now, captain." McCoy lowered the glasses from his eyes. "That's Resolution Island. We are forty miles beyond Hao Island, and the wind is in our teeth."

"Get ready to beach her then. Where's the entrance?"

"There's only a canoe passage. But now that we know where we are, we can run for Barclay de Tolley. It is only one hundred and twenty miles from here, due nor'-nor'-west. With this breeze we can be there by nine o'clock to-morrow morning."

Captain Davenport consulted the chart and debated with himself.

"If we wreck her here," McCoy added, "we'd have to make the run to Barclay de Tolley in the boats just the same."

The captain gave his orders, and once more the *Pyrenees* swung off for another run across the inhospitable sea.

And the middle of the next afternoon saw despair and mutiny on her smoking deck. The current had accelerated, the wind had slackened, and the *Pyrenees* had sagged off to the west. The lookout sighted Barclay de Tolley to the eastward, barely visible from the masthead, and vainly and for hours the *Pyrenees* tried to beat up to it. Ever, like a mirage, the cocoanut-trees hovered on the horizon, visible only from the masthead. From the deck they were hidden by the bulge of the world.

Again Captain Davenport consulted McCoy and the chart. Make Molay seventy-five miles to the south-west. Its lagoon was thirty miles long, and its entrance was excellent. When Captain Davenport gave his orders, the crew refused duty. They announced that they had had enough of hell-fire under their feet. There was the land. What if the ship could not make it? They could make it in the boats. Let her burn, then. Their lives amounted to something to them. They had served

faithfully the ship, now they were going to serve themselves.

They sprang to the boats, brushing the second and third mates out of the way, and proceeded to swing the boats out and to prepare to lower away. Captain Davenport and the first mate, revolvers in hand, were advancing to the break of the poop, when McCoy, who had climbed on top of the cabin, began to speak.

He spoke to the sailors, and at the first sound of his dovelike, cooing voice they paused to hear. He extended to them his own ineffable serenity and peace. His soft voice and simple thoughts flowed out to them in a magic stream, soothing them against their wills. Long-forgotten things came back to them, and some remembered lullaby songs of childhood and the content and rest of the mother's arm at the end of the day. There was no more trouble, no more danger, no more irk, in all the world. Everything was as it should be, and it was only a matter of course that they should turn their backs upon the land and put to sea once more with hell-fire hot beneath their feet.

McCoy spoke simply; but it was not what he spoke. It was his personality that spoke more eloquently than any word he could utter. It was an alchemy of soul occultly subtle and profoundly deep—a mysterious emanation of the spirit, seductive, sweetly humble, and terribly imperious. It was illumination in the dark crypts of their souls, a compulsion of purity and gentleness vastly greater than that which resided in the shining, death-spitting revolvers of the officers.

The men wavered reluctantly where they stood, and those who had loosed the turns made them fast again. Then one, and then another, and then all of them, began to sidle awkwardly away.

McCoy's face was beaming with childlike pleasure as he descended from the top of the cabin. There was no trouble. For that matter there had been no trouble averted. There never had been any trouble, for there was no place for such in the blissful world in which he lived.

"You hypnotised 'em," Mr. Konig grinned at him, speaking in a low voice.

"Those boys are good," was the answer. "Their hearts are good. They have had a hard time, and they have worked hard, and they will work hard to the end."

Mr. Konig had no time to reply. His voice was ringing out orders, the sailors were springing to obey, and the *Pyrenees* was paying slowly off from the wind until her bow should point towards Makemo.

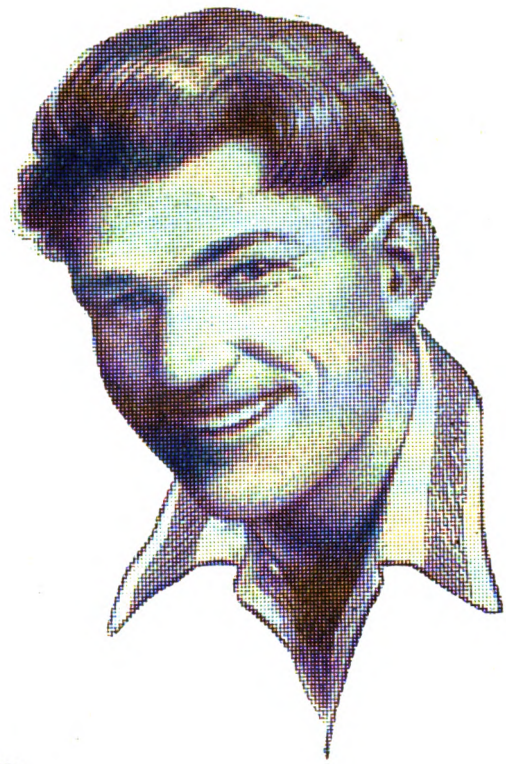
The wind was very light, and after sundown almost ceased. It was insufferably warm, and fore and aft men sought vainly to sleep. The deck was too hot to lie upon, the poisonous vapours, oozing through the seams, crept like evil spirits over the ship, stealing into the nostrils and windpipes of the unwary and causing fits of sneezing and coughing. The stars blinked lazily in the dim vault overhead; and the full moon, rising in the east, touched with its light the myriads of wisps and threads and spidery films of smoke that intertwined and writhed and twisted along the deck, over the rails, and up the masts and shrouds.

"Tell me," Captain Davenport said, rubbing his smarting eyes, "what happened with that *Bounty* crowd after they reached Pitcairn? The account I read said they burnt the *Bounty*, and that they were not discovered until many years later. But what happened in the meantime? I've always been curious to know. They were men with their necks in the rope. There were some native men, too. And then there were women. That made it look like trouble right from the jump."

"There was trouble," McCoy answered. "They were bad men. They quarrelled about the women right away. One of the mutineers, Williams, lost his wife. All the women were Tahitian women. His wife fell from the cliffs when hunting sea-birds. Then he took the wife of one of the native men away from him. All the native men were made very angry by this, and they killed off nearly all the mutineers. Then the mutineers that escaped killed off all the native men. The women helped. And the natives killed each other. Everybody killed everybody. They were terrible men.

"Timiti was killed by two other natives while they were combing his hair in friendship. The white men had sent them to do it. Then the white men killed them. The wife of Tullaloo killed him in a cave because she wanted a white man for husband. They were very wicked. God had hidden His face from them. At the end of two years all the native men were murdered, and all the white men except four. They were Young, John Adams, McCoy, who was my great-grandfather, and Quintal. He was a very

(*Continued on page 146.*)



Take

Beecham's Pills

and

wake up smiling

bad man, too. Once, just because his wife did not catch enough fish for him, he bit off her ear."

"They were a bad lot!" Mr. Konig exclaimed.

"Yes, they were very bad," McCoy agreed, and went on serenely cooing of the blood and lust of his iniquitous ancestry. "My great-grandfather escaped murder in order to die by his own hand. He made a still and manufactured alcohol from the roots of the ti-plant. Quintal was his chum, and they got drunk together all the time. At last McCoy got delirium tremens, tied a rock to his neck, and jumped into the sea.

"Quintla's wife—the one whose ear he bit off—also got killed by falling from the cliffs. Then Quintal went to Young and demanded his wife, and went to Adams and demanded his wife. Adams and Young were afraid of Quintal. They knew he would kill them. So they killed him, the two of them together, with a hatchet. Then Young died. And that was about all the trouble they had."

"I should say so," Captain Davenport snorted. "There was nobody left to kill."

"You see, God had hidden His face," McCoy said.

¶

BY morning no more than a faint air was blowing from the eastward, and, unable to make appreciable southing by it, Captain Davenport hauled up full-and-by on the port track. He was afraid of that terrible westerly current which had cheated him out of so many ports of refuge. All day the calm continued, and all night, while the sailors, on a short ration of dried banana, were grumbling. Also, they were growing weak and complaining of stomach pains caused by the straight banana diet. All day the current swept the *Pyrenees* to the westward, while there was no wind to bear her south. In the middle of the first dog-watch, cocoanut-trees were sighted due south, their tufted heads rising above the water and marking the low-lying atoll beneath.

"That is Taenga Island," McCoy said. "We need a breeze to-night, or else we'll miss Makemo."

"What's become of the south-east trade?" the captain demanded. "Why don't it blow? What's the matter?"

"It is the evaporation from the big lagoons—there are so many of them," McCoy explained. "The evaporation upsets the whole system of trades. It even causes the wind to back up and blow gales from the south-west. This is the Dangerous Archipelago, captain."

Captain Davenport faced the old man, opened his mouth, and was about to curse, but paused and refrained. McCoy's presence was a rebuke to the blasphemies that stirred in his brain and trembled in his larynx. McCoy's influence had been growing during the many days they had been together. Captain Davenport was an autocrat of the sea, fearing no man, never bridling his tongue, and now he found himself unable to curse in the presence of this old man with the feminine brown eyes and the voice of a dove. When he realised this, Captain Davenport experienced a distinct shock. This old man was merely the seed of McCoy, of McCoy of the *Bounty*, the mutineer fleeing from the hemp that awaited him in England, the McCoy who was a power for evil in the early days of blood and lust and violent death on Pitcairn Island.

Captain Davenport was not religious, yet in that moment he felt a mad impulse to cast himself at the other's feet—and to say he knew not what. It was an emotion that so deeply stirred him, rather than a coherent thought, and he was aware in some vague way of his own unworthiness and smallness in the presence of this other man who possessed the simplicity of a child and the gentleness of a woman.

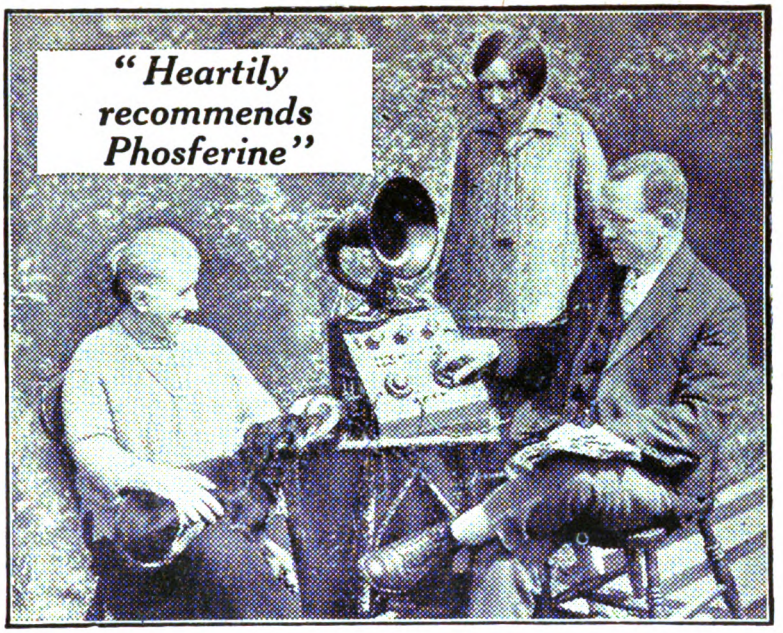
Of course he could not so humble himself before the eyes of his officers and men. And yet the anger that had prompted the blasphemy still raged in him. He smote the cabin with his clenched hand and cried:

"Look here, old man, I won't be beaten. These Paumotus have cheated and tricked me and made a fool of me. I refuse to be beaten. I am going to drive this ship, and drive and drive and drive clear through the Paumotus to China but what I find a bed for her. If every man deserts, I'll stay by her. I'll show the Paumotus. They can't fool me. She's a good girl, and I'll stick by her."

"And I'll stay with you, captain," McCoy said.

During the night, light, baffling airs blew out of the south, and the frantic captain, with his cargo on fire, watched and measured his westward drift and went off by himself at times to curse softly so that McCoy should not hear.

(Continued on page 148.)



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Daylight showed more palms growing out of the water to the south.

"That's the leeward point of Makemo," McCoy said. "Katiu is only a few miles to the west. We may make that."

But the current, sucking between the two islands, swept them to the north-west, and at one in the afternoon they saw the palms of Katiu rise above the sea and sink back into the sea again.

A few minutes later, just as the captain had discovered that a new current from the north-east had gripped the *Pyrenees*, the masthead lookouts raised cocoanut palms in the north-west.

"It is Raraka," said McCoy. "We won't make it without wind. The current is drawing us down to the south-west. But we must watch out. A few miles farther on a current flows north and turns in a circle to the north-west. This will sweep us away from Fakarava, and Fakarava is the place for the *Pyrenees* to find her bed."

"They can sweep all they da—all they well please," Captain Davenport remarked with heat. "We'll find a bed for her somewhere just the same."

¶

BUT the situation on the *Pyrenees* was reaching a culmination. The deck was so hot that it seemed an increase of a few degrees would cause it to burst into flames. In many places even the heavy-soled shoes of the men were no protection, and they were compelled to step lively to avoid scorching their feet. The smoke had increased and grown more acrid. Every man on board was suffering from inflamed eyes, and they coughed and strangled like a crew of tuberculosis patients. In the afternoon the boats were swung out and equipped. The last several packages of dried bananas were stored in them, as well as the instruments of the officers. Captain Davenport even put the chronometer into the long-boat, fearing the blowing up of the deck at any moment.

All night this apprehension weighed heavily on all, and in the first morning light, with hollow eyes and ghastly faces, they stared at one another as if in surprise that the *Pyrenees* still held together and that they still were alive.

Walking rapidly at times, and even occasionally breaking into an undignified hop, skip and run, Captain Davenport inspected his ship's deck.

"It is a matter of hours now, if not of minutes," he announced on his return to the poop.

The cry of land came down from the masthead. From the deck the land was invisible, and McCoy went aloft, while the captain took advantage of the opportunity to curse some of the bitterness out of his heart. But the cursing was suddenly stopped by a dark line on the water which he sighted to the north-east. It was not a squall, but a regular breeze—the disrupted trade-wind, eight points out of its direction, but resuming business once more.

"Hold her up, captain," McCoy said as soon as he reached the poop. "That's the easterly point of Fakarava, and we'll go in through the passage full-tilt, and wind abeam, and every sail drawing."

At the end of an hour, the cocoanut-trees and the low-lying land were visible from the deck. The feeling that the end of the *Pyrenees'* resistance was imminent weighed heavily on everybody. Captain Davenport had the three boats lowered and dropped short astern, a man in each to keep them apart. The *Pyrenees* closely skirted the shore.

"Get ready to wear her, captain," McCoy warned.

And a minute later the land parted, exposing a narrow passage and the lagoon beyond, a great mirror, thirty miles in length and a third as broad.

"Now, captain."

For the last time the yards of the *Pyrenees* swung around as she obeyed the wheel and headed into the passage. The turns had scarcely been made, and nothing had been coiled down, when the men and mates swept back to the poop in panic terror. Nothing had happened, yet they averred that something was going to happen. They could not tell why. They merely knew that it was about to happen. McCoy started forward to take up his position on the bow in order to con the vessel in; but the captain gripped his arm and whirled him around.

"Do it from here," he said. "That deck's not safe. What's the matter?" he demanded the next instant. "We're just standing still."

McCoy smiled.

"You are bucking a seven-knot current, captain," he said. "That is the way the full ebb runs out of this passage."

At the end of another hour the *Pyrenees*

(Continued on page 150.)

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P.391

had scarcely gained her length, but the wind freshened and she began to forge ahead.

" Better get into the boats, some of you," Captain Davenport commanded.

His voice was still ringing, and the men were just beginning to move in obedience, when the amidship deck of the *Pyrenees*, in a mass of flame and smoke, was flung upward into the sails and rigging, part of it remaining there and the rest falling into the sea. The wind being abeam, was what had saved the men crowded aft. They made a blind rush to gain the boats, but McCoy's voice, carrying its convincing message of vast calm and endless time, stopped them.

" Take it easy," he was saying. " Everything is all right. Pass that boy down somebody, please."

The man at the wheel had forsaken it in a funk, and Captain Davenport had leaped and caught the spokes in time to prevent the ship from yawing in the current and going ashore.

" Better take charge of the boats," he said to Mr. Konig. " Tow one of them short, right under the quarter. . . . When I go over, it'll be on the jump."

Mr. Konig hesitated, then went over the rail and lowered himself into the boat.

" Keep her off half a point, captain."

Captain Davenport gave a start. He had thought he had the ship to himself.

" Ay, ay ; half a point it is," he answered.

Amidships, the *Pyrenees* was an open, flaming furnace, out of which poured an immense volume of smoke which rose high above the masts and completely hid the forward part of the ship. McCoy, in the shelter of the mizzen-shrouds, continued his difficult task of conning the ship through the intricate channel. The fire was working aft along the deck from the seat of explosion, while the searing tower of canvas on the mainmast went up and vanished in a sheet of flame. Forward, though they could not see them, they knew that the headsails were still drawing.

" If only she don't burn all her canvas off before she makes inside," the captain groaned.

" She'll make it," McCoy assured him with supreme confidence. " There is plenty of time. She is bound to make it. And once inside, we'll put her before it ; that will keep the smoke away from us and hold back the fire from working aft."

A tongue of flame sprang up the mizzen, reached hungrily for the lowest tier of canvas, missed it, and vanished. From aloft a burning shred of ropestuff fell square on the back of Captain Davenport's neck. He acted with the celerity of one stung by a bee as he reached up and brushed the offending fire from his skin.

" How is she heading, captain ? "

" Nor'-west by west."

" Keep her west-nor'-west."

Captain Davenport put the wheel up and steadied her.

" West by north, captain."

" West by north she is."

" And now west."

Slowly, point by point, as she entered the lagoon, the *Pyrenees* described the circle that put her before the wind ; and point by point, with all the calm certitude of a thousand years of time to spare, McCoy chanted the changing course.

" Another point, captain."

" A point it is."

Captain Davenport whirled several spokes over, suddenly reversing and coming back one to check her.

" Steady."

" Steady she is—right on it."

Despite the fact that the wind was now astern, the heat was so intense that Captain Davenport was compelled to steal sidelong glances into the binnacle, letting go the wheel, now with one hand, now with the other, to rub or shield his blistering cheeks.

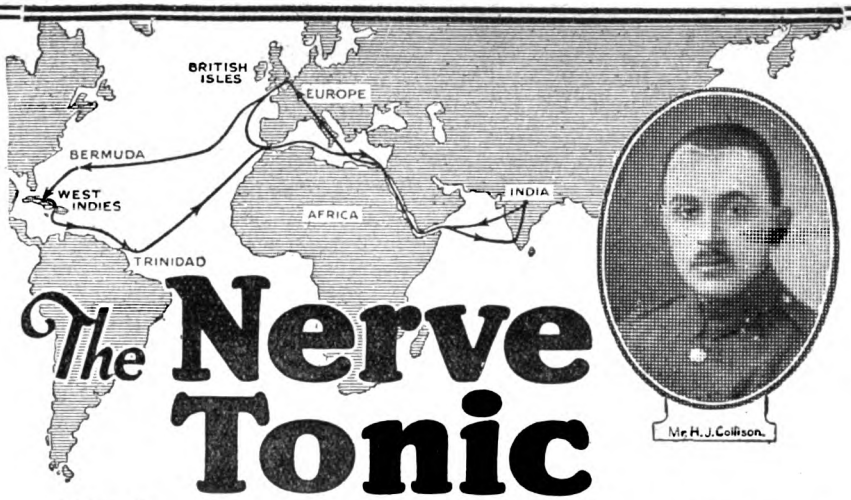
McCoy's beard was crinkling and shrivelling, and the smell of it, strong in the other's nostrils, compelled him to look toward McCoy with sudden solicitude. Captain Davenport was letting go the spokes alternately with his hands in order to rub their blistering backs against his trousers. Every sail on the mizzen-mast vanished in a rush of flame, compelling the two men to crouch and shield their faces.

" Now," said McCoy, stealing a glance ahead at the low shore, " four points up, captain, and let her drive."

Shreds and patches of burning rope and canvas were falling about them, and upon them. The tarry smoke from a smouldering piece of rope at the captain's feet set him off into a violent coughing fit, during which he still clung to the spokes.

The *Pyrenees* struck, her bow lifted, and she ground ahead gently to a stop. A shower of burning fragments, dislodged by the shock, fell about them. The ship moved ahead again and struck a second time. She

(Continued on page 152.)



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crushed the fragile coral under her keel, drove on, and struck a third time.

"Hard over," said McCoy. "Hard over?" he said gently, a minute later.

"She won't answer," was the reply.

"All right. She is swinging around." McCoy peered over the side. "Soft, white sand. Couldn't ask better. A beautiful bed."

As the *Pyrenees* swung around, her stern away from the wind, a fearful blast of smoke and flame poured aft. Captain Davenport deserted the wheel in blistering agony. He reached the painter of the boat that lay under the quarter, then looked for McCoy, who was standing aside to let him go down.

"You first," the captain cried, gripping him by the shoulder and almost throwing him over the rail. But the flame and smoke were too terrible, and he followed hard after McCoy, both men wriggling on the rope and sliding down into the boat together. A sailor in the bow, without waiting for orders, slashed the painter through with his sheath-knife. The oars, poised in readiness, bit into the water, and the boat shot away.

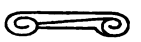
"A beautiful bed, captain," McCoy murmured, looking back.

"Ay, a beautiful bed, and all thanks to you," was the answer.

The three boats pulled away for the white beach of pounded coral, beyond which, on the edge of a cocoanut grove, could be seen a half-dozen grass-houses, and a score or more of excited natives, gazing wide-eyed at the conflagration that had come to land.

The boats grounded and they stepped out on the white beach.

"And now," said McCoy, "I must see about getting back to Pitcairn."



The Formation of Taste

WHOEVER has so far formed his taste, as to be able to relish and feel the beauties of the great masters, has gone a great way in his study; for, merely from a consciousness of this relish of the right, the mind swells with an inward pride, and is almost as powerfully affected, as if it had itself produced what it admires. Our hearts, frequently warmed in this manner by the contact of those whom we wish to resemble, will undoubtedly catch something of their way of thinking; and we shall receive in our own bosoms some radiation at least of their fire and splendour. That disposition, which is so strong in children, still continues with us, of catching involuntarily the general air and manner of those with whom we are most conversant; with this difference only, that a young mind is naturally pliable and imitative; but in a more advanced state it grows rigid, and must be warmed and softened before it will receive a deep impression.

From these considerations, which a little of your own reflection will carry a great way further, it appears, of what great consequence it is, that our minds should be habituated to the contemplation of excellence; and thus, far from being contented to make such habits the disciple of our youth only, we should, to the last moment of our lives, continue a settled intercourse with all the true examples of grandeur. Their inventions are not only the food of our infancy, but the substance which supplies the fullest maturity of our vigour . . .

Nor, whilst I recommend studying the Art from Artists, can I be supposed to mean that Nature is to be neglected; I take this study in aid, and not in exclusion of the other. Nature is and must be the fountain which alone is inexhaustible, and from which all excellencies must originally flow.

SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS.

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THE ARGOSY

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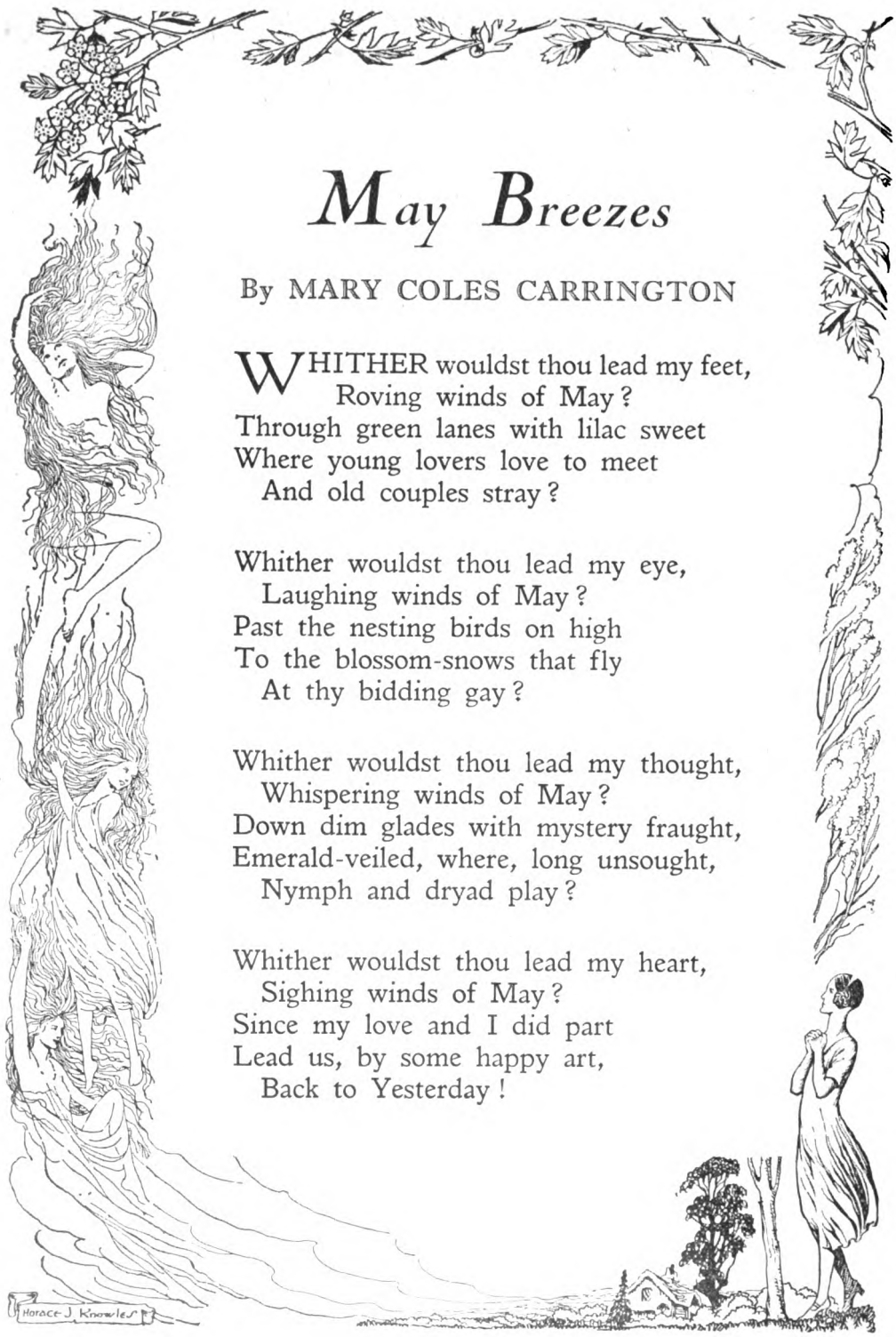

May Breezes

By MARY COLES CARRINGTON

WHITHER wouldst thou lead my feet,
Roving winds of May?
Through green lanes with lilac sweet
Where young lovers love to meet
And old couples stray?

Whither wouldst thou lead my eye,
Laughing winds of May?
Past the nesting birds on high
To the blossom-snows that fly
At thy bidding gay?

Whither wouldst thou lead my thought,
Whispering winds of May?
Down dim glades with mystery fraught,
Emerald-veiled, where, long unsought,
Nymph and dryad play?

Whither wouldst thou lead my heart,
Sighing winds of May?
Since my love and I did part
Lead us, by some happy art,
Back to Yesterday!

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Babu of the Folies Bergères

"Man dreams of fame while woman wakes to love"

By I. A. R. WYLIE

BABU danced in the front row of the ballet. She did not dance well—in fact, strictly speaking, she did not dance at all. She merely gave an active and visible expression of herself, and " herself " was a wild young creature, the very essence of the Boulevards, as you see them at night time, teeming with irresponsible and irrepressible good spirits, and about as " gamin " as anything the liveliest part of the Quartier Latin ever produced.

Babu was born in the Quartier Latin—a disappointing region for strangers on the look out for wicked, delightful Bohemianism—à la Trilby—and an unpleasant region if you have to live in it and bring up various members of a family on a closely calculated number of sous per diem. This latter feat Babu had accomplished. A delightful Bohemian papa, with a poetic weakness for absinthe, and a delightful Bohemian mamma with all the virtues save the domestic ones, not to mention a baby sister altogether adorable, were kept afloat by Babu's fantastic efforts in the ballet. It had been an uphill business, for, as it has been mentioned, Babu could not dance. She had very little idea of rhythm, and no idea at all of order. An ordinary maître du ballet would not have kept her an hour. Fortunately for Babu and her amiable but unworldly belongings, Monsieur Beriot, of the Folies Bergères, was not " ordinary." He realised that in dancing, as in everything else, it is temperament that counts, and Babu had temperament enough and to spare. Moreover, she had a face which alone was worth a week's salary. All the devil-may-care gaiety, cynicism, tenderness, precocious sorrow and precocious joy of life that hall-marks the Parisian street child were stamped on her small, impish face and glanced out of the dark, restless eyes. Her hair was black, short and tousled, her eyebrows boldly arched, and the resolute mouth expressed silently the store of pungent repartee awaiting some venturesome and unwary cause. That it was an old mouth set in a young face lent it an additional piquancy. Indeed, it was the mixture of youth and age, sympathy and harshness, laughter and sternly checked tears that made her irresistible, covered over her irregular steps, silenced criticism, and set her in the front row among her betters, who neither loved nor hated her. They simply feared her. She was too coolly self-assured to be safe, and her dancing suggested an ineffectual safety valve of a machine working at high pressure so that even the elegant habitués of the green-room spared her their facetious attentions. But many who never bothered to see a ballet in their lives came to see Babu dance, and many an understanding artist's eye took a half-regretful pleasure in the reckless challenge of her temperament. Such was Babu of the Folies Bergères.

Babu of the Folies Bergères

From the thin stream of satiated pleasure-seekers which poured out of the Folies' familiar portals, two men involuntarily separated themselves and came to an undecided halt on the edge of the kerb. Though alike neither in feature, colouring, nor build, they were obviously of the same nationality. In their somewhat effete surroundings their as yet untainted Anglo-Saxon virility was almost obtrusive. From their appearance a no less profound gulf of circumstance separated one man from the other. The elder bore the complacent marks of health and success; the younger looked ill, and his clothes shone more than sartorial elegance requires. He selected from the proffered cigar-case with the ungraciousness of poverty.

"Thanks!" he jerked out. "You've been immensely kind to me, Simmons. It's the first decent evening I've had for months—since our London days, in fact."

"Don't mention it," was the casual answer. "It's a pleasure to do anything for an old studio comrade." He struck a match and the red glow lit up the clean-shaven, somewhat harsh-featured face. "What you want is a chance, Severin," he added with the easy assurance of the onlooker. "You have talent. One hit and you'll be 'there,' as the saying goes."

"Chances don't come easily to poor beggars of my order," Richard Severin answered. "Even talent can't go without material to work with and a decent model. It's different, of course, for big pots like you. You can choose and take what you want."

Simmons applied himself thoughtfully to his Havana.

"How's little Esther?" he asked suddenly and without any apparent connection. "Doing well?"

Severin winced.

"She writes cheery letters. It's hard on her—this waiting."

"It's hard on you both," Simmons agreed sympathetically. "You have been engaged two years?"

"Two years and a month. It'll be a good many more years, unless——"

"Unless what?"

"The Académie is offering twenty thousand francs for a statue representing 'Life.' I'm going to try for it."

"You?"

Severin made a little deprecatory movement of the hands.

"Oh, I know—I haven't any influence. But the subject attracts me, inspires me. To-night I felt that I could do it better than anything else—if I had my model."

"A model—for 'Life'?" Simmons laughed sceptically. "Is that not rather a tall order, my dear fellow? I confess the subject leaves my mind blank, and the idea of a model—unless you think a bonepicker suitable—seems to me futile. Whoever has seen a model answering to such a requirement?"

"I have—to-night."

"Might one ask where?"

"In the front row of the ballet."

Simmons carefully avoided the splash of a passing taxi-cab.

"'Life' in the front row of the ballet?" he queried, still laughing.

"It sounds strange, I know." Severin's voice rang with suppressed enthusiasm. "But she was just 'it'—just what these Parisian folk understand by 'Life'—sad and gay, kind and cruel, reckless and calculating, everything in a breath and nothing for certain. I have the whole face, the whole pose in my head, just as I saw her to-night. If she would sit for me I believe I could do it. I am almost sure."

A fresh exodus from the Folies drove the two men farther along the pavement. Simmon's cigar had gone out.

"I dare say," he said, "I have guessed whom you mean. There isn't another head like Mademoiselle Babu's in all Paris. And your idea is good. What are you going to offer her?"

"Nothing; but I'll pay up gloriously if I succeed."

"If you succeed!" Simmons laughed again. "I'm afraid it won't do, dear fellow. The ladies of the ballet are—like your conception of 'Life'—calculating. I cannot imagine that one of them will sacrifice her days to you on the terms you mentioned. Theoretically our French friends love 'la gloire'; practically, they prefer cash down."

Richard Severin lifted his haggard young face to the light.

"I'm going to try, all the same," he said. "I'm superstitious. I have the feeling that that girl will bring me luck—my luck. If I fail—well, it's all over, that's all."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean I shall set Esther free. It's not fair to keep a woman dangling for ever on to a failure." Severin's voice shook. "It's

my last shot," he added with a woeful attempt at a laugh.

"You might go back to your people."

The face under the lamplight hardened.

"I won't do that. I'd rather go into the Seine."

Simmons stopped. Seeing that his cigar had gone out he threw it impatiently into the gutter.

"In that case I wish you luck," he said. "May Mademoiselle Babu prove more complaisant than she looks. Au revoir, my dear Severin. Call me up when you have another spare evening."

He shook hands, lifted his hat with continental completeness and left his companion standing uncertainly on the edge of the crowd.

Ten minutes later Babu came out of the gloomy fastnesses of the dressing-rooms like a tiger-cat out of its lair, lithe, to all appearances indifferent, in reality keenly alert. She did not so much as glance at the little group of elegant loafers who swarmed round the stage door, but when a carefully-dressed man approached her, hat in hand, she made a detour, avoiding him.

"Pardon, mademoiselle."

She ignored him, her fine little nose well lifted, her mouth grim, but he was persistent, and at the corner of the Boulevard she swung round.

"*Eh bien?*" she said sharply.

"Pardon, mademoiselle." His smile was coolly friendly. "Would you permit me to accompany you a few steps on your way?"

She eyed him.

"I can't prevent you walking along the Boulevard if you want to," she said.

"Ah, I thank you." But she remained stationary, and he had perforce to offer an explanation. "Mademoiselle, I had the pleasure of seeing you dance to-night," he began.

She laughed.

"Ah, ça! Monsieur Beriot would be pleased to hear you call it a pleasure," she said. "Has monsieur anything more of interest to relate? I am in a hurry."

"In the first place I ought to explain who I am——"

"Did I ask?"

"No, but my profession may explain my purpose in addressing you. I am a sculptor."

"Monsieur has not the air of an artist," she commented with a shrewd glance at his attire.

"A fortunate one," he explained lightly.

"Ah, a bad one, then!"

He joined in her abrupt amusement with good grace.

"I see that mademoiselle is as quick with her tongue as with her feet," he said. "I lay down my arms and will be brief. I desire to make a statue of mademoiselle—as I saw her to-night, dancing, and for this I must have mademoiselle for my model, exclusively as my model. You understand? I do not wish you to sit for anybody else. No doubt you have sat before?"

"No," she said curtly. "At night I dance and in the daytime I take in washing. That is enough."

"Assuredly; mademoiselle is right. But washing is an unprofitable business. As a sitter mademoiselle may command her price. I offer mademoiselle ten francs for an afternoon."

"Bah!" she said. Her eyes travelled restlessly along the gay Boulevard, and her foot in the neat, much patched shoe, beat impatiently on the pavement. "Have you done?" she inquired.

"You refuse?"

"Most certainly."

"Why?"

His tone was now edged with temper, and she noted the fact with impish satisfaction.

"I like not artists in patent-leather boots," she answered.

"Twenty francs!" he persisted angrily.

"Ah, now—get along with you," she requested in crisp idiomatic French which defies translation.

He stood, hesitating, biting his lips, thwarted, but no less determined.

"Here is my card," he said at last. "You will change your mind. Remember, you can ask your price."

She accepted the slip of cardboard between the tips of her fingers, glanced at it and tossed it into the gutter.

"Simmons!" she said. "*Alors—bon soir*, Monsieur Simmons!" and was gone.

¶

BABU of the Folies Bergères proceeded on her way to the less elegant parts of the city with the air of a conqueror. Neither the round velvet cap pressed down rakishly on the defiant mop of dark hair, nor the obvious poverty of her dress could detract from the dignity of her independence. People—even swaggering young bullies—

made way for her, and she acknowledged the unwilling courtesy with absent-minded graciousness, not looking at them or at anybody, but very intent on herself and her own business. Nevertheless, at the corner of the Rue du Printemps—a misnomer by the way, for nothing less spring-like than the narrow, stuffy little back street could be imagined—she hesitated. Not for a moment had her faculties missed the steady masculine tread behind her, hurrying or lingering, according to the measure of her own step. She suspected the pursuit of the artist in patent-leather boots. Beneath the light of a lantern she faced about.

"*Eh bien?*" she said.

It was her war-cry, a challenge, a defiance, peppered with mockery, and her attitude, without anything of the grande dame about it, was no less crushingly effective. Yet her pursuer held his ground a few feet off, neither advancing nor retreating.

"Please forgive me," he began in faltering French. "I know I am guilty of an impertinence. I have not the slightest right to speak to you or follow you. Indeed, for the last ten minutes I have been in a mortal funk. I wanted to turn tail and bolt——"

"But you didn't," she interrupted, but he looked her in the eyes with such earnest purpose that she hesitated, half amused, half curious.

"Believe me, I wouldn't have stuck to it if I had not been desperate," he went on breathlessly.

"Desperate?" she echoed.

"You see, I am an artist, a sculptor."

She clapped her hands in a gust of satirical gaiety.

"Ah, *mon Dieu*, and yet another!"

"Of course, I know no one has ever heard of me. I'm a failure," he admitted humbly. "In fact, to-night I felt like throwing up everything and going into the Seine. Then I saw you——"

"Do you want me to fish you out?" she asked.

"No," he laughed unsteadily. "But you gave me hope—an idea. You inspired me."

"Many thanks, monsieur."

"Please do not think I—I am making fun of you. I'm awfully in earnest. I don't know what made me think you would help me. It just struck me that perhaps—you, too, knew what it means to be desperate—and you, too, are an artist——"

"Me—an artist?"

"You seemed to put your whole soul into your dancing," he explained simply. "That's what I call being an artist."

"What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to stand for me—just as you are now with your head thrown back, your arms akimbo. Above all, I want your head; it expresses all I want to say but can't translate into form. It means everything to me—success or failure. It's my last chance."

"And what are you going to pay me?" she asked brutally.

"Nothing; I haven't got anything. If I win the Académie's prize—why, I'll give you what you like. But I can't promise, can I?"

"Not very well," she admitted, studying him.

"I must seem mad, or even worse," he went on brokenly. "I hardly stopped to think. I see now how absurd I have been. Forgive me, and good evening, mademoiselle."

He was still hat in hand when she stopped him. His gaunt young face was turned to the lamplight, and its expression testified to the despair which he held back behind brave smiling lips.

"Where's your studio?" she demanded.

He blushed like a boy.

"My studio? It's not exactly a studio. A garret——"

"Never mind. Where is it?"

"Number Fifty, Rue d'Arthur."

"It is well—lead the way!"

"Mademoiselle, so late?"

"In the daytime I wash, in the evening I dance," she retorted. "From ten to midnight I stand for you. *En avant!*"

"Mademoiselle, how can I thank you?"

"Ah, bah, as between artists!" She laughed carelessly and gave him her hand. "Forward, my little Englishman!"

II

BABU stood on the threshold and sniffed.

"Then it's true," she said.

"What's true?" he asked. He was busy lighting the big paraffin lamp which hung from the ceiling, and the yellow murky light flooded down on a wilderness of broken casts and unfinished studies. A heap of wet clay lay on the table, which to all appearances was the only serviceable piece of furniture.

"This," she said. "Over here we always think of English people as milords. You are really poor."

"Really poor." He smiled at her as he dragged his modelling stand into position. "Only I needn't be. My people are well enough off, but they don't like my doing this sort of thing. They don't believe in me, and they won't help. If I had some success——" He hesitated. 'Perhaps I shall have now," he added wistfully.

"Perhaps." She tossed her coat into a far corner. "What do you want me to do?"

"Stand as you did before, when I spoke to you; yes, like that! It's splendid! If you only knew what it meant not to have to work out one's elusive imaginings and to have the real thing before one!"

"The real thing—what is it?"

"'Life.'"

She laughed.

"*Ciel!* I didn't know I was as grand as all that!"

"Life isn't always grand."

His coat followed hers. He began to work in feverish haste, and the clay became a living thing in his hands. She watched him curiously out of the corners of her eyes.

"How often do you get enough to eat?" she asked suddenly.

"As often as I sell anything."

"Is that often?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

"I know the hungry look," she answered confidently.

"Materials cost such a lot," he explained. "They swallow up everything."

"*Pauvre petit!*"

He looked up, attracted by the inflection of her voice. It was still a trifle mocking but kindly, almost maternal, and her eyes smiled at him.

"Why do they call you Babu?" he asked apropos of nothing.

"Oh, I know not. They could find nothing better. I am not like a 'Fifi,' am I?"

"Not exactly. I shouldn't have wanted you if you were."

"And I should not have stood for you if I had been."

"That's too deep for me," he said, laughing.

After that he almost forgot her. He worked under the pressure of his mood, inspired as it was by the half-defiant, half-luring figure before him. His artist's eyes appreciated every line in the truculent little face, but his mental eye saw another woman, as unlike this denizen of the Quartier Latin as a lily is unlike the poppy, fair and gracious, with eyes whose depths betrayed the wells of patient devotion that were his. And for this woman he worked, forgetful of the woman before him. He did not see that she grew pale, that pain began to temper the fierce decision of the compressed lips. Nor did he hear footsteps on the rickety stairs. When the door opened he started like a man awaking from deep sleep.

"Simmons!" he exclaimed.

The man standing on the threshold bowed with exaggerated courtesy. Nevertheless, he did not look at Severin, but at the clay model, and his eyes were hawklike in their swift, measuring appreciation.

"I apologise," he said. "I saw lights in your window and thought I would find out what you were up to at this time of night. Ah, I see you have been successful." He had caught sight of Babu standing beneath the light, and his smile broadened. "Good evening, mademoiselle."

She did not reply to this greeting. She dropped from her pose, swaying a little as the stiffened muscles relaxed, and began to gather up her hat and coat. Simmons waved his hand in protest.

"Oh, I am not going to disturb. Continuez, mes enfants. Severin, the pose is excellent—an inspiration. You will carry the Académie by storm. But who could fail with such a model?"

"Yes, I'm in luck, am I not?" Severin agreed with glowing enthusiasm. "I feel the turn of the tide, Simmons, and I believe it's going to carry me a jolly long way. Think, Mademoiselle Babu is standing out of pure kindness—just to help a poor, struggling artist."

"All for love, eh?" Simmons's satirical glance encountered Babu's. "Well, you deserve it. I'll drop in another time and see how things progress. Good-night, my good children!"

For a minute after he had closed the door neither Severin nor Babu spoke. Severin felt himself overcome by a sudden reasonless depression, and stood staring silently at his work. Babu, in her turn, watched him with moody eyes.

"Who was that?" she asked abruptly

"A friend—an old studio friend."

"A sculptor, too?"

"Yes. How did you know?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I guessed." She lied with the insouciant ease of her class, and Severin smiled.

"He's first rate. But he's rich and doesn't try much, thank Heaven. If he wanted to, and he had you as a model, he'd knock me into a cocked hat. Are you going—already?"

"It's past twelve."

"So it is—how thoughtless of me! And how tired you look! I am a brute. Will you come again?"

"Oh, I will come—have no fear." She gave him her hand again, and this time he kissed it with a shy little affectation of gallantry. A deep flush spread under her dark somewhat sallow skin, spoilt by its nightly submersion beneath bad cosmetics.

"Ah bah, *ca c'est stupide!* Good-night, my friend."

"Good-night, mademoiselle."

"You can call me Babu—as between comrades."

"Good-night, then—Babu!"

He lighted her down the dark, rickety staircase; then he went back into his studio and closed the door. It seemed to him that the miserable garret had grown gloomier, the light yellower, more dingy. He seated himself on the edge of the table and looked at his work. His imagination, racing into the future, smoothed the rough outline to perfection.

And that night, amidst his dreams of the woman in the distant English village, he saw success—with the face of Babu of the Folies Bergères.

III

FROM that evening onwards she came regularly. On the stroke of ten she tapped at the studio door, and five minutes later they were hard at work. At intervals they talked, and out of her short, vivid sentences he gathered something of her life—a thing grimly humorous and whimsically tragic. It crept into his statue, and "Life" grew apace into an allegorical figure that needed no superscription.

As for Babu, she became for him a kind of spirit which flitted up to him out of the darkness of the back stairs. He did not notice that her gaiety began to ring strained, or that she grew thin and wan-looking. It was not unnatural that he failed to notice these things. He did not feel his own needs nor the sharpening grip of hunger. Things physical became insignificant in his delirious thirst for success. Then one day he met her as she came out of a rehearsal. It was the first time they had seen each other in daylight, and the daylight treated them none too kindly. It revealed the many pitiful subterfuges of poverty, the darned coat, the patched shoe, and, worst of all, the hunger sign of hollow cheeks and sunken eyes. Severin, as usual, was blind, but Babu saw and stopped short, her mouth grim, her eyes pitying.

"I'm sorry," he began abruptly. "Don't think I'm intruding. I thought it was only right to tell you—you don't need to come to-night; it's all over."

"All over?" She walked on with her short, brisk step, her hands with their neatly mended gloves thrust deep in her pockets, her brows knitted. "What is over, my friend?"

"Everything. My landlord has given notice. To-morrow I shall be turned out neck and crop."

"Ah, bah, that is nothing at all," said Babu with the superiority of long experience. "That happens to us every week. All one has to do is to remember an old friend or pay a visit to one's uncle."

Severin laughed shakily.

"I haven't the one—and even uncles have a tendency to cold-shoulder relatives who come empty-handed. But don't you worry your small head about me." He tried to draw himself up with boyish dignity. "I'll pull through somehow. But our jolly sittings are over. I want to thank you, Babu——"

"Oh, hold your tongue!" she said rudely. They had turned into a quiet side street, and she whirled round on him. "When did you have your breakfast?" she demanded.

He tried to laugh again, but the effort sent him reeling against the wall of a house, whose brick-red surface made his face look whiter than paper.

"I don't remember——"

"That means—not to-day and perhaps not yesterday——"

"Perhaps—those confounded materials, you know——"

"Ah, name of a potato!" said Babu, whose vocabulary was vigorous and wholly original. For a moment she stood frowning at him, her quick brain hunting for expedients. Then she nodded.

" Try your friend, Monsieur Simmons," she said ; " he is rich."

" I can't, Babu. He is my friend, but there are reasons—reasons I can't explain to you—which makes it impossible for me to ask him for help."

Babu shrugged her shoulders impatiently. Quite suddenly her expression changed.

" Then, I suppose, you will go home to your people ? " she said quietly.

He shook his head. The moment's weakness had passed, and he held himself like a ramrod.

" No, I'm not going home. I won't go home till I've won—even if it's never. I'll fight it out."

" Ah ! " She gave a low, curiously contented laugh. " That's English—bull-dog, *n'est ce pas ? Eh bien*, my little Englishman, run home as fast as your shaky legs can carry you, kick monsieur your landlord downstairs, then lie down yourself and forget everything till I come. Promise ! " She had seized him by the lapels of his coat, and he looked down into a face full of awakened joyous devilment. " Promise ! " she reiterated, and shook him.

" Little Babu ! " Quite unconsciously his voice became very tender. " Little Babu—I owe you such a lot that I can't refuse. Besides, there isn't much else for me to do, is there ? "

" No ; that is true. Good-bye, then, and don't get mistaken for a shadow and run over ! "

She patted him lightly on either cheek, put her hat straight with feminine adroitness and started off down the street, her cheap, inordinately high-heeled shoes clip-clapping merrily on the pavement. At the corner she waved to him and disappeared.

Half an hour later she was tapping vigorously at a door which bore the simple inscription, " John Simmons, sculptor." Simmons himself answered the summons. He wore his overalls, but neither his dress nor the luxuriously appointed studio behind him suggested any severe application. As he recognised his visitor he bowed satirically and motioned her to enter.

" What can I do for mademoiselle ? "

She stood for a moment looking about her with critical, unawed interest.

" It's a question of what I can do for you and how much you are going to pay me for it," she then retorted.

" Ah, then you have thought over my offer ? " he suggested. He went over to the fireside and pulled up a chair. " Won't you sit down ? "

" Many thanks—no. To tell the truth, I never thought about you at all."

" That was unkind. Yet you remembered my address. What excellent memories women have ! "

She gave no sign of annoyance.

" I am willing to consider an offer," she said briefly.

" I suggested twenty francs——"

" Monsieur, you are insulting ! "

He laughed at her extravagant assumption of dignity, and then grew grave. For a minute he considered her, his eyes screwed together in the intensity of mental concentration.

" Look here," he said at last, " I am a rich artist though a poor one, and I can afford a luxury. I dearly wish to put mademoiselle into marble, and am ready to pay for the privilege. What do you say to fifty francs the sitting ? "

She remained doubtful, apparently unimpressed.

" It is to be considered. Paid in advance?"

" Certainly. I have every confidence in mademoiselle."

Her eyes flashed, but she merely shrugged her shoulders.

" I have a condition," she proceeded with deliberation.

" And that is—— ? "

" That you will not compete against my friend, Monsieur Severin."

He laughed outright.

" My dear mademoiselle, do I look the person to go running after a paltry handful of francs ? Besides, I am such a poor artist that I could not do much damage, could I ? "

" I do not trust you," said Babu.

" Mademoiselle is severe." He was still smiling good-naturedly. " Well, what assurance can I give ? Let me see, how many times have you stood for Monsieur Severin ? "

" At least twenty."

" Is the statue finished ? "

She shook her head.

" I ask for two sittings. Your common sense must tell you that that is not enough to do harm. I wish to make a rough study of you—no more. Are you satisfied ? "

She considered him. His expression was engagingly sincere.

" I am satisfied," she acknowledged.

He went over to a writing-desk and

opened a drawer. Babu's sharp ears caught the clink of gold and the rustle of paper. Five ten-franc notes were laid on the table. Simmons motioned her to approach.

"*Voila!*" he said cheerfully.

Babu counted the slips of paper.

"To-morrow I will come," she announced and was gone like a flash.

Not an hour after she had given her injunctions to Severin she was climbing up the stairs leading to the garret in the Rue d'Arthur. She had a bulky parcel under each arm and a package, shaped suspiciously like a wine bottle, hung suspended from her neck. But her step was no less brisk, her carriage no less impudently independent, and she entered the garret studio with the gusto of an actress conscious that she is effecting a remarkable *coup de théâtre*. There on the threshold she stopped. The defiant, half completed image of herself stared at her over the motionless, prostrate figure of a man. And it was then that a great change came over Mademoiselle Babu of the Folies Bergères. The street child developed suddenly into a woman. She put the packages gently but swiftly from her, and in an instant was on her knees, bending over the quiet form in a storm of almost savage tenderness.

"Ah, my little Englishman, my poor little Englishman!"

He held a letter in his clenched fist. She tore it from him and flung it aside with an instinctive hatred. His head was on her lap and she stroked the dark hair from his forehead, calling to him, uttering soft, low-noted sounds over him like a young tigress over her wounded offspring. Presently Severin's eyes opened, and he looked up at her.

"Hallo, Babu!" he said. "How stupid! I must have fainted."

She laid her finger on his lips.

"Do not talk, little Englishman. It is the want of all those breakfasts that has done this. See, here is wine, bread, a little breakfast that I will cook for you so that your mouth shall water at the mere smell of the gravy. And behold! Monsieur your landlord sends his apologies. He will not venture to trouble you for a month to come. Are you not pleased? Can we not work together, you and I, and in a few weeks, perhaps, you will be famous!"

"Babu!"—his tone was gravely reproving—"how did you get the money?"

"How I got the money? Hear how he asks! Do you think I have stolen it? My little friend, did you not know that we of the Folies roll in money? *Par exemple!* I found a few gold pieces in my top drawer, and I said to myself, 'Why should I not give my little Englishman a hand? When he is rich he will pay me back a hundredfold. It will be a good investment.' You see, I am a business woman, and——"

He interrupted her gay, incoherent outpouring with a tired gesture.

"Babu, you are a fraud; a humbug with the best heart in the world. But it's no good, dear; I'm done—knocked out. It's all over."

"All over? How often have you sung that song to-day? And have I not told you—monsieur the landlord is paid."

"I know; it isn't that." He lifted himself on his elbow so that his head rested against her shoulder. "It's something else—something I've wanted to tell you before; but it was difficult. One does not talk of one's real self, does one? One pretends—perhaps because the secret seems a sacred one. But now you might as well know. You see, I loved someone—in England, Babu." He stopped a minute. Babu's clasp on his hand had relaxed, her eyes had grown large and fixed, her lips colourless. "I worked for her," he went on, half to himself, "and we were to have been married when I made my name. To-day her father wrote to me. He has heard from a mutual friend that I am not worthy of her, that I have betrayed her, that I fail because I spend my life—well, like a scoundrel. He tells me that the engagement is at an end. And Esther will obey him. Oh, yes, I know her! She is a good daughter." He gave a harsh, bitter little laugh, and closed his eyes. "So it's all over," he repeated monotonously.

"All over!" She drove her hard fingers into his shoulders in a paroxysm of angry protest. "You say that? You are going to break up for the sake of a poor, cowardly, weak woman? You, who are an Englishman and a great sculptor."

He shook his head.

"Babu, you don't understand. Greatness and success isn't enough—at least, not for me. I suppose I'm a weak character. I must have someone to work for—someone who cares. And now no one cares."

"I care."

He started, lifting his face to hers in blank bewilderment.

"Babu, you care? Babu, it isn't possible."

"Ah, ça!" She flung her arms about him in a tempestuous outburst of protecting, half-childish, half-maternal tenderness. "If you only knew how I care, my little Englishman!"

"But, Babu——"

She sprang to her feet, dusted herself and held out two strong hands.

"Come, get up! I have no wish to be buried alive in the dust of this studio. Sit on the edge of the table and drink a little of my wine; it will do you good. See, there is already colour in your cheeks. And now I will make that beefsteak. Ah, you will see if I care or not!" She laughed excitedly, but at the door she turned and looked back at him. "You will forget her?" she said.

He nodded, his eyes fixed on the ground.

"Oh, yes; I'll forget all right, little Babu!"

IV

AFTER that Babu danced such wild fantastic steps at the Folies that the ballet master scarcely knew whether he ought to dismiss her or raise her to her position of *prima ballerina*. In the end he compromised. Babu danced a *pas de seul*, and the same people crowded in every night to see it, because it was never the same, and its royal indifference to the music was something wonderful to behold.

In the meantime her gaiety bubbled over like the effervescence of a newly-opened bottle of champagne, and it took a delicate palate to discover that it was flavoured with a sobering sense of responsibility. She laughed, and her manner was exuberant, audacious, impudently challenging; but there was always that wall of grave purpose behind it all against which it was not advisable to bump oneself.

And Severin's statue—"Life"—neared its triumphant completion. His fellow artists came in often and shook their heads in profound, unprejudiced admiration.

"There was nothing like it," they affirmed. "There was only one other man in Paris who could have done it."

And Babu, knowing of whom they spoke, felt a tightening at the heart. How fortunate that she had only given him two sittings! For she distrusted Simmons with a blind distrust that could not be shaken.

Babu was very happy—happier than she had ever been in all the course of her stormy career. When Severin won the twenty thousand francs—as he was bound to do—they were to be married and go to Italy, where he could work and study to his heart's content. The prospect filled the untravelled Babu with a wild delight, and Severin smiled gravely as an old man smiles at the joy of a child. It was curious how old he had grown—in a single day. No doubt, as Babu said, it was the want of all those breakfasts.

Two weeks later the statue of "Life" was finished. Babu had a holiday, and to celebrate the occasion there was to be a sumptuous banquet. Babu bought a pound of the best sausage at her favourite charcuterie, a minute pot of paté de foie gras—her highest idea of extravagance—and a bottle of champagne, which, it is to be feared, had never travelled farther south than Paris.

Babu sang as she mounted the narrow stairs. Her singing, like her dancing, erratic but joyous. In the middle of an astonishing trill she broke off. It was as though the string of a violin—none too well tuned—had suddenly snapped. Voices sounded from behind the closed door of the garret. One she recognised as Severin's; the other was unknown but hated. Babu ran up the remaining steps swiftly and silently. Her code of honour was not of the highest. She stood listening, her hands clenched, her under-lip between her teeth, her face lifted in pale attention. A woman was speaking. The voice sounded low but firm and full of repressed feeling.

"You thought too little of me, Richard," she was saying. "You thought I was a child, incapable of an independent thought or action, much less of a strong love. You are wrong. I have come here to prove that you are wrong. I do not believe what has been said of you, and in any case, it would make no difference. I love you, that is the one thing that matters."

She paused. Of her actual words the listening woman outside, with her smattering of English culled from Severin's playful instruction, understood less than a third. But she had understood "I love you," and her instinct made the rest clear. She stood rigid, waiting for Severin's answer.

"It is too late," he said gravely. "There is Babu."

"I know—you have told me; but she,

crushed the fragile coral under her keel, drove on, and struck a third time.

"Hard over," said McCoy. "Hard over?" he said gently, a minute later.

"She won't answer," was the reply.

"All right. She is swinging around." McCoy peered over the side. "Soft, white sand. Couldn't ask better. A beautiful bed."

As the *Pyrenees* swung around, her stern away from the wind, a fearful blast of smoke and flame poured aft. Captain Davenport deserted the wheel in blistering agony. He reached the painter of the boat that lay under the quarter, then looked for McCoy, who was standing aside to let him go down.

"You first," the captain cried, gripping him by the shoulder and almost throwing him over the rail. But the flame and smoke were too terrible, and he followed hard after McCoy, both men wriggling on the rope and sliding down into the boat together. A sailor in the bow, without waiting for orders, slashed the painter through with his sheath-knife. The oars, poised in readiness, bit into the water, and the boat shot away.

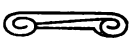
"A beautiful bed, captain," McCoy murmured, looking back.

"Ay, a beautiful bed, and all thanks to you," was the answer.

The three boats pulled away for the white beach of pounded coral, beyond which, on the edge of a cocoanut grove, could be seen a half-dozen grass-houses, and a score or more of excited natives, gazing wide-eyed at the conflagration that had come to land.

The boats grounded and they stepped out on the white beach.

"And now," said McCoy, "I must see about getting back to Pitcairn."



The Formation of Taste

WHOEVER has so far formed his taste, as to be able to relish and feel the beauties of the great masters, has gone a great way in his study; for, merely from a consciousness of this relish of the right, the mind swells with an inward pride, and is almost as powerfully affected, as if it had itself produced what it admires. Our hearts, frequently warmed in this manner by the contact of those whom we wish to resemble, will undoubtedly catch something of their way of thinking; and we shall receive in our own bosoms some radiation at least of their fire and splendour. That disposition, which is so strong in children, still continues with us, of catching involuntarily the general air and manner of those with whom we are most conversant; with this difference only, that a young mind is naturally pliable and imitative; but in a more advanced state it grows rigid, and must be warmed and softened before it will receive a deep impression.

From these considerations, which a little of your own reflection will carry a great way further, it appears, of what great consequence it is, that our minds should be habituated to the contemplation of excellence; and thus, far from being contented to make such habits the disciple of our youth only, we should, to the last moment of our lives, continue a settled intercourse with all the true examples of grandeur. Their inventions are not only the food of our infancy, but the substance which supplies the fullest maturity of our vigour . . .

Nor, whilst I recommend studying the Art from Artists, can I be supposed to mean that Nature is to be neglected; I take this study in aid, and not in exclusion of the other. Nature is and must be the fountain which alone is inexhaustible, and from which all excellencies must originally flow.

SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS.

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too, makes no difference. It is sad—tragic, if you like—but circumstances, not we, are to blame. You belong to me. There is only one thing that can send me away from you. Do you love her ? "

" No." His voice rang firm. " That I swear to you, Esther. I have only loved one woman in my life, and I shall never love another. I owed a lot to little Babu. She was my friend, a loyal little comrade, but I thought no more of her than if she were a child. Afterwards, when I got that letter—well, she saved me, and I was grateful. That is all ; but it is enough. In honour bound, I——"

Babu flung open the door. She had no definite idea of what she meant to do. Her untutored temperament had taken the bit between its teeth. She saw Severin, white and earnest, and by his side a fair, sweet-looking woman, who faced her without flinching. That steady dignity opened the gates of hell in Babu's heart. A flood of savage invective, culled from the gutters of her birthplace, rushed to her lips and streamed on like a molten torrent. In the end she laughed and snapped her fingers.

" You think I care ? " she jeered. " You think I shall break my heart over you ? You think you will have to buy me off ? Ah, I mock—I laugh. What do I care ? I have been kind to a little fool of an Englishman—I took pity on a milksop. *Eh bien*, why not ? One has one's follies. But it is over. Go with your white-faced Englishwoman—I shan't cry after you ; I hate you—hate you."

She turned and rushed blindly down the stairs. At the bottom she stumbled and fell to her knees. Her little velvet cap was jerked to a ludicrous angle over one ear, her dark hair hung in wild disorder over her livid face. And she cried, fiercely, with low, hoarse sobs that were like the groans of some wounded, infuriated animal at bay. Presently she grew quieter and began to think. Her thoughts were like goads. How childish, how ineffectual she had been ! How they would laugh at her up there ! A common little ballet girl ! What does it matter how one treats her ? Anything is good enough for her—she is accustomed to it. And the joke of the thing is that she can't hit back—she can't hit back !

Babu rose to her feet. Her red-hot rage and misery froze to something that felt hard and sharp as tempered steel. She was hurt—desperately hurt—and she wanted to hurt back. The thought of striking as she had been struck was the only conceivable balsam. She went out on to the street. Her hat was still awry, and mechanically she set it to rights. There was nothing about her to betray the persistent cruelty working behind the small, smooth forehead. Her thoughts took no definite shape. Revenge had become an instinct in her, giving her cunning and a swiftness of action. Yet outwardly she was the same. Even Simmons, when he opened the door, at first glance saw no change.

" Well ? " he said curtly. She lifted her face and looked at him intently without speaking, and his manner changed. " Come in," he said. " What is the matter ? "

She followed him into the studio. As once before, she stood gazing about her, but her eyes had lost all power of concentration They saw only her purpose.

" What is it ? " Simmons repeated.

" I want you to do something for me."

" Lend you money, eh ? "

" No." She turned round. " I want to sit for you," she said. " I'll sit day and night for you—I'll sit as long as you can work. I want you to make that statue. I want you to send it in—and win."

Simmons lifted his eyebrows. A dull flush had mounted his sallow cheeks.

" What—against your friend ? "

" He isn't my friend." Her eyes met his in sullen, smouldering rage. " I hate him."

" Ah ! " Simmons laughed with a kind of smothered excitement. " I like to hear you say that, Mademoiselle Babu. But it's rather late. The competitors must send in their work next week. You can't expect to create something in a week which will beat Severin's work of months."

" I hate him," she repeated, as though the mere statement were sufficient answer. " He has spoilt everything—everything."

Simmons nodded.

" It's a way he has. I understand. It isn't hard to guess. Poor Babu ! "

" I don't want your pity ! " she blazed out.

" No, you want me to help you." He went to the far corner of the room and laid his hand on the large Japanese screen. " It's strange, Babu, but I do not love your friend either. He has spoilt everything for me just as he has done for you. He spoilt my chances with the woman he wants to marry. You see, I am confidential. You and I are going to put a spoke in his wheel. I don't want my old love back any more

than you want him, but I want to *pay* back, drop for drop, ounce for ounce. Jewish, eh? Never mind. It's queer that you and I should have helped each other unconsciously." He pulled back the screen. "There!" he said, with a short sign of satisfaction. "What do you think of it?"

She lifted her heavy eyes. On a broad-based pedestal she saw Severin's statue of herself, but glorified by genius, rarefied by inspiration. It was almost the same attitude, almost the same execution, but in the subtle discrepancies lay the vital difference. The figure had been cut straight out of a block of pure marble—a piece of artistic virtuosity which Babu scarcely appreciated. But she knew by instinct that this was a masterpiece.

"You did it?" she said dully.

"Yes—from two sittings. Good, isn't it? I don't suppose you quite see how good it is, but the committee will. Of course, I humbugged you a little, but as it happens it has turned out to our mutual satisfaction, eh?"

She nodded, her interest centred on the subject before her. The inscription "Life" had been cut in gold on the ebony pedestal, but to her the statue bore another name. It seemed to her that Simmons had carved her and his own fever for revenge into the white marble effigy of herself, and beneath the thin layer of beauty she saw that which made her shrink as from something loathsome.

What passed through Babu in that moment she herself could not have told. In the end she turned to the sculptor, who was still wrapt in smiling contemplation of his masterpiece. She looked at him intently. From the very beginning he had meant to ruin Severin—he had meant to cheat her. But she was a ballet girl, outside the pale of common honesty—and perhaps it was right that it should be so. Perhaps there was justice in the system. Ballet girls are not worth much.

"May I look at it closer?" she asked.

He started.

"By all means."

She drew nearer. There was a hammer lying at the foot of the pedestal. She snatched it up and struck the statue into a dozen pieces. The crash mingled with a hoarse cry of fury behind her. She turned.

"It was ugly—very ugly," she said. "I'm glad I did it. And now you can send for the police."

For a moment Simmons's raised arm threatened her. His face was distorted and blotched. Only very slowly did he regain sufficient self-control to speak.

"Thanks—I think I will," he said. "It may seem petty to revenge myself on anything like you, but I'm made like that. I always pay back."

He rang the bell.

Babu waited patiently, her eyes fixed on the shapeless atoms at her feet.

It was three months before Babu danced again at the Folies Bergères, and when she danced it was so methodically, with such painstaking precision, that no one recognised her. The maître du ballet relegated her to the fourth row. She had lost her temperament, he said.

Rumour had it that the famous young sculptor who had won the Académie's prize with his statue, "Life," had interested himself on her behalf. It was quite natural—she had been his model. But she refused all assistance.

In the daytime she took in washing, and at night she danced.

And the studio-garret in the Rue d'Arthur stood empty.

Evening in Verse

STAR that bringest home the bee,
And sett'st the weary labourer free!
If any star shed peace, 'tis thou,
That send'st it from above,
Appearing when heaven's breath and brow
Are sweet as hers we love.

Come to the luxuriant skies,
Whilst the landscape's odours rise,
Whilst far-off lowing herds are heard,
And songs when toil is done,
From cottages whose smoke unstirred
Curls yellow in the sun.

Star of love's soft interviews,
Parted lovers on thee muse;
Their remembrancer in heaven
Of thrilling vows thou art,
Too delicious to be riven
By absence from the heart.

THOMAS CAMPBELL.

NOW sleeps the crimson petal, now the white;
Nor waves the cypress in the palace walk;
Nor winks the gold fin in the porphyry font:
The firefly wakens: waken thou with me.

Now droops the milk-white peacock like a ghost,
And like a ghost she glimmers on to me.

Now lies the Earth all Danaë to the stars,
And all thy heart lies open unto me.

ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON.

IF aught of oaten stop, or pastoral song,
May hope, chaste Eve, to sooth thy modest ear,
Like thy own solemn springs,
Thy springs and dying gales;

O nymph reserved, while now the bright-hair'd sun
Sits in yon western tent, whose cloudy skirts,
With brede ethereal wove,
O'erhanging his wavy bed:

Now air is hush'd, save where the weak-eyed bat
With short shrill shriek flits by on leathern wing,
Or where the beetle winds
His small but sullen horn,

As oft he rises, 'midst the twilight path
Against the pilgrim borne in heedless hum:
Now teach me, maid composed,
To breathe some soften'd strain,

Whose numbers, stealing through thy darkening vale,
May not unseemly with its stillness suit,
As, musing slow, I hail
Thy genial loved return!

WILLIAM COLLINS.

Told By The Schoolmaster

By JOHN GALSWORTHY

The latest story of a notable author, told with irresistible charm

WE all remember still, I suppose, the singular beauty of the summer when the war broke out. I was then schoolmaster in a village on the Thames. Nearly fifty, with a game shoulder and extremely deficient sight, there was no question of my fitness for military service, and this, as with many other sensitive people, induced in me, I suppose, a mood abnormally receptive. The perfect weather, that glowing countryside, with corn harvest just beginning and the apples already ripening, the quiet nights trembling with moonlight and shadow and, in it all, this great horror launched and growing, the weazening of Europe deliberately undertaken, the death-warrant of millions of young men signed—— Such summer loveliness walking hand in hand with murder thus magnified beyond conception was too piercingly ironical!

One of those evenings, towards the end of August, when the news of Mons was coming through, I left my house at the end of the village street and walked up towards the Downs. I have never known anything more entrancing than the beauty of that night. All was still and coloured like the bloom of dark grapes; so warm, so tremulous. A rush of stars was yielding to the moon fast riding up, and from the corn-stooks of that early harvest the shadows were stealing out. We had no daylight-saving then, and it was perhaps half-past nine when I passed two of my former scholars, a boy and a girl, standing silently at the edge of an old gravel pit, opposite a beech clump. They looked up and gave me good evening. Passing on over the crest, I could see the unhedged fields to either hand; the corn stooked and the corn standing, just gilded under the moon; the swelling Downs of a blue-grey; and the beech clump I had passed dark-cut against the brightening sky. The moon itself was almost golden, as if it would be warm to the touch, and from it came a rain of glamour over sky and fields, woods, downs, farm-houses and the river down below. All seemed in a conspiracy of unreality to one obsessed, like me, by visions of the stark and trampling carnage going on out there. Refuging from that grim comparison, I remember thinking that Jim Beckett and Betty Roofe were absurdly young to be sweethearting, if indeed they were, for they hadn't altogether looked like it. They could hardly be sixteen yet, for they had only left school last year. Betty Roofe had been head of the girls; an interesting child, alert, self-contained, with a well-shaped, dark-eyed little face and a head set on very straight. She was the daughter of the village laundress, and I used to think too good for washing clothes, but she was already at it and, as things went in that village, would probably go on doing it till she married. Jim Beckett was working on Carver's farm down there below me and the gravel pit was about half way between their homes. A good boy, Jim, freckled, reddish in the hair and rather too small in the head; with blue eyes that looked at you very straight and a short nose; a well-grown boy, very big for his age, and impulsive in spite of the careful stodginess of all young rustics; a curious vein of the sensitive in him, but a great deal of obstinacy, too — altogether an interesting blend!

I was still standing there when up he came on his way to Carver's and I look back to that next moment with as much regret as to any in my life.

He held out his hand.

"Good-bye, sir, in case I don't see you again."

"Why, where are you off to, Jim?"

"Joinin' up."

"Joining up? But, my dear boy, you're two years under age, at least."

He grinned. "I'm sixteen this month, but I bet I can make out to be eighteen. They ain't particular, I'm told."

I looked him up and down. It was true, he could pass for eighteen well enough,

with military needs what they were. And possessed, as everyone was just then, by patriotism and anxiety at the news, all I said was:

"I don't think you ought, Jim; but I admire your spirit."

He stood there silent, sheepish at my words. Then:

"Well, good-bye, sir. I'm goin' to ——ford to-morrow."

I gave his hand a good hard squeeze. He grinned again, and without looking back, ran off down the hill towards Carver's farm, leaving me alone once more with the unearthly glamour of that night. God! what a crime was war! From this hushed moonlit peace boys were hurrying off to that business of man-made death as if there were not Nature's deaths galore to fight against. And we—we could only admire them for it! Well! I have never ceased to curse the sentiment which stopped me from informing the recruiting authorities of that boy's real age.

Crossing back over the crest of the hill towards home I came on the child Betty, at the edge of the gravel pit where I had left her.

"Well, Betty, was Jim telling you?"

"Yes, sir; he's going to join up."

"What did you say to him?"

"I said he was a fool, but he's so headstrong, Jim!" Her voice was even enough, but she was quivering all over.

"It's very plucky of him, Betty."

"M'm! Jim just gets things into his head. I don't see that he has any call to go and—and leave me."

I couldn't help a smile. She saw it, and said sullenly:

"Yes, I'm young, and so's Jim; but he's my boy, for all that!"

And then, ashamed or startled at such expansiveness, she tossed her head, swerved into the beech clump like a shying foal, and ran off among the trees. I stood a few minutes, listening to the owls, then went home and read myself into forgetfulness on Scott's first Polar book.

So Jim went and we knew him no more for a whole year. And Betty continued with her mother washing for the village.

II

IN September, 1915, just after term had begun again, I was standing one afternoon in the village schoolroom pinning up on the wall a pictorial piece of imperial information for the benefit of my scholars, and thinking, as usual, of the war, and its lingering deadlock. The sunlight slanted through on to my dusty forms and desks, and under the pollard lime trees on the far side of the street I could see a soldier standing with a girl. Suddenly he crossed over to the school, and there in the doorway was young Jim Beckett in his absurd short-tailed khaki jacket, square and tanned to the colour of his freckles, looking, indeed, quite a man.

"How d'you do, sir?"

"And you, Jim?"

"Oh, I'm fine! I thought I'd like to see you. Just got our marching orders. Off to France to-morrow; been havin' my leave."

I felt the catch at my throat that we all felt when youngsters whom we knew were going out for the first time.

"Was that Betty with you out there?"

"Yes—fact is, I've got something to tell you, sir. She and I were spliced last week at ——mouth. We been stayin' there since, and I brought her home to-day, as I got to go to-night."

I was staring hard, and he went on hurriedly:

"She just went off there and I joined her for my leave. We didn't want any fuss, you see, because of our bein' too young."

"Young!"

The blankness of my tone took the grin off his face.

"Well, I was seventeen a week ago and she'll be seventeen next month."

"Married? Honest Injun, Jim?"

He went to the door and whistled. In came Betty, dressed in dark blue, very neat and self-contained; only the flush on her round young face marked any disturbance.

"Show him your lines, Betty, and your ring."

The girl held out the official slip and from it I read that a registrar had married them at ——mouth, under right names and wrong ages.

Then she slipped a glove off and held up her left hand—there was the magic hoop! Well! the folly was committed; no use in crabbing it!

"Very good of you to tell me, Jim," I said at last. "Am I the first to know?"

"Yes, sir. You see, I've got to go at once, and like as not her mother won't want it to get about till she's a bit older. I

thought I'd like to tell *you*, in case they said it wasn't all straight and proper."

"Nothing I say will alter the fact that you've falsified your ages."

Jim grinned again.

"That's all right," he said. "I got it from a lawyer's clerk in my platoon. It's a marriage all the same."

"Yes; I believe that's so."

"Well, sir, there she is till I come back." Suddenly his face changed; he looked for all the world as if he were going to cry; and they stood gazing at each other exactly as if they were alone.

The lodger at the carpenter's, three doors down the street, was performing her usual afternoon solo on the piano, "*Connais tu le pays?*" from "Mignon." And whenever I hear it now, seldom enough in days contemptuous of harmony, it brings Jim and Betty back through a broad sunbeam full of dancing motes of dust; it epitomises for me all the *drang*—as the Germans call it—of those horrible years, when marriage, birth, death and every human activity were speeded up to their limit, and we did from year's end to year's end all that an enlightened humanity should not be doing, and left undone most of what it should have done.

"What time is it, sir?" Jim asked me suddenly.

"Five o'clock."

"Lord! I must run for it. My kit's at the station. Could I leave her here, sir?"

I nodded and walked into the little room beyond. When I came back she was sitting where she used to sit in school, bowed over her arms spread out on the inky desk. Her dark bobbed hair was all I could see, and the quivering jerky movement of her young shoulders. Jim had gone. Well! That was the normal state of Europe, then! I went back into the little room to give her time, but when I returned once more she, too, had gone.

III

THE second winter passed, more muddy, more bloody even than the first, and less shot through with hopes of an ending. Betty showed me three or four of Jim's letters, simple screeds with a phrase here and there of awkward and half-smothered feeling, and signed always "Your loving hubby, Jim." Her marriage was accepted in the village. Child-marriage was quite common then. In April it began to be obvious that their union was to be "blessed" as they call it.

One day early in May I was passing Mrs. Roofe's when I saw that lady in her patch of garden, and stopped to ask after Betty.

"Nearin' her time. I've written to Jim Beckett. Happen he'll get leave."

"I think that was a mistake, Mrs. Roofe. I would have waited till it was over."

"Maybe you're right, sir; but Betty's that fidgetty about him not knowin'. She's dreadful young, you know, t' 'ave a child. I didn't 'ave my first till I was twenty-one."

"Everything goes fast these days, Mrs. Roofe."

"Not my washin'. I can't get the help, with Betty like this. It's a sad business this about the baby comin'. If he does get killed I suppose she'll get a pension, sir?"

Pension? Married in the wrong age, with the boy still under service age, if they came to look into it. I really didn't know.

"Oh, surely, Mrs. Roofe! But we won't think about his being killed. Jim's a fine boy."

Mrs. Roofe's worn face darkened.

"He was a fool to join up before his time; plenty of chance after, seemingly; and then to marry my girl like this! Well, young folk *are* fools!" . . .

I was sitting over my Pensions work one evening, a month later, for it had now fallen to me to keep things listed in the village, when someone knocked at my door, and who should be standing there but Jim Beckett!

"Why! Jim! Got leave?"

"Ah! I had to come and see her. I haven't been there yet; didn' dare. How is she, sir?"

Pale and dusty, as if from a hard journey, his uniform all muddy and unbrushed, and his reddish hair standing up anyhow—he looked wretched, poor boy!

"She's all right, Jim. But it must be very near, from what her mother says."

"I haven't had any sleep for nights, thinking of her—such a kid, she is!"

"Does she know you're coming?"

"No, I haven't said nothing."

"Better be careful. I wouldn't risk a shock. Have you anywhere to sleep?"

"No, sir."

"Well, you can stay here if you like. They won't have room for you there." He seemed to back away from me.

"Thank ye, sir, I wouldn' like to put you out."

"Not a bit, Jim; delighted to have you and hear your adventures."

He shook his head. "I don' want to talk of them," he said darkly. "Don't you think I could see 'er to-night, sir? I've come a long way for it, my God! I have!"

"Well, try! But see her mother first."

"Yes, sir," and he touched his forehead. His face, so young a face, already had that look in the eyes of men who stare death down.

He went away and I didn't see him again that night. They had managed, apparently, to screw him into their tiny cottage. He was only just in time, for two days later Betty had a boy-child. He came to me the same evening, after dark, very excited.

"She's a wonder," he said; "but if I'd known I'd never ha' done it, sir, I never would. You can't tell what you're doing till it's too late, it seems."

Strange saying from that young father, till afterwards it was made too clear!

Betty recovered quickly and was out within three weeks.

Jim seemed to have long leave, for he was still about, but I had little talk with him, for, though always friendly, he seemed shy of me, and as to talking of the war—not a word! One evening I passed him and Betty leaning on a gate, close to the river—a warm evening of early July, when the Somme battle was at its height. Out there hell incarnate; and here intense peace, the quietly flowing river, the willows, and unstirring aspens, the light slowly dying, and those two young things, with their arms round each other and their heads close together—her bobbed dark hair and Jim's reddish mop, getting quite long! I took good care not to disturb them. His last night, perhaps, before he went back into the furnace!

¶

IT was no business of mine to have my doubts, but I had been having them long before that very dreadful night when, just as I was going to bed, something rattled on my window, and going down I found Betty outside, distracted.

"Oh, sir, come quick! They've 'rested Jim."

As we went over she told me:

"Oh, sir, I was afraid there was some mistake about his leave—it was so long; I thought he'd get into trouble over it, so I asked Bill Pateman"—(the village constable)—"and now they've come and 'rested him for deserting. Oh! What have I done? What have I done?"

Outside the Roofes' cottage Jim was standing between a Corporal's guard, and Betty flung herself into his arms. Inside I could hear Mrs. Roofe expostulating with the Corporal and the baby crying. In the sleeping quiet of the village street, smelling of hay just harvested, it was atrocious.

I spoke to Jim. He answered quietly, in her arms:

"I asked for leave, but they wouldn't give it. I had to come. I couldn't stick it, knowing how it was with her."

"Where was your regiment?"

"In the line."

"Good God!"

Just then the Corporal came out. I took him apart.

"I was his schoolmaster, Corporal," I said. "The poor chap joined up when he was just sixteen—he's still under age, you see; and now he's got this child-wife and a new-born baby!"

The Corporal nodded; his face was twitching, a lined, decent face with a moustache.

"I know, sir," he muttered. "I know. Cruel work, but I've got to take him. He'll have to go back to France."

"What does it mean?"

He lifted his arms from his sides and let them drop, and that gesture was somehow the most expressive and dreadful I ever saw.

"Deserting in face of the enemy," he whispered hoarsely. "Bad business! Can you get that girl away, sir?"

But Jim himself undid the grip of her arms and held her from him. Bending, he kissed her hair and face, then, with a groan, he literally pushed her into my arms and marched straight off between the guard.

And I was left in the dark, sweet-scented street with that distracted child struggling in my grasp.

"Oh, my God! My God! My God!" Over and over and over. And what could one say or do?

IV

ALL the rest of that night, after Mrs. Roofe had got Betty back into the cottage, I sat up writing in duplicate the facts about

Jim Beckett. I sent one copy to his regimental headquarters, the other to the chaplain of his regiment in France. I sent fresh copies two days later with duplicates of his birth certificates to make quite sure. It was all I could do. Then came a fortnight of waiting for news. Betty was still distracted. The thought that, through her anxiety, she herself had delivered him into their hands nearly sent her off her head. Probably her baby alone kept her from insanity, or suicide. And all that time the battle of the Somme raged and hundreds of thousands of women in England and France and Germany were in daily terror for their menfolk. Yet none, I think, could have had quite the feeling of that child. Her mother, poor woman, would come over to me at the schoolhouse and ask if I had heard anything.

" Better for the poor girl to know the worst," she said, " if it is the worst. The anxiety's killin' 'er."

But I had no news and could not get any at headquarters. The thing was being dealt with in France. Never was the scale and pitch of the world's horror more brought home to me. This deadly little tragedy was as nothing—just a fragment of straw whirling round in that terrible wind.

And then one day I did get news—a letter from the chaplain—and seeing what it was I stuck it in my pocket and sneaked down to the river—literally afraid to open it till I was alone. Crouched up there, with my back to a haystack, I took it out with trembling fingers.

Dear Sir,

The boy Jim Beckett was shot to-day at dawn. I am distressed at having to tell you and the poor child his wife. War is a cruel thing indeed.

I had known it. Poor Jim! Poor Betty! Poor, poor Betty! I read on :

I did all I could; the facts you sent were put before the Court Martial and the point of his age considered. But all leave had been stopped; his request had been definitely refused; the regiment was actually in the line, with fighting going on—and the situation extremely critical in that sector. Private considerations count for nothing in such circumstances—the rule is adamant. Perhaps it has to be—I cannot say. But I have been greatly distressed by the whole thing, and the Court itself was much moved. The poor boy seemed dazed; he wouldn't talk, didn't seem to take in anything; indeed, they tell me that all he said after the verdict, certainly all I heard him say, was : " My poor wife! My poor wife! " over and over again. He stood up well at the end.

He stood up well at the end! I can see him yet, poor impulsive Jim. Desertion, but not cowardice, by the Lord! No one who looked into those straight, blue eyes could believe that. But they bandaged them, I suppose. Well! a bullet in a billet more or less; what was it in that wholesale slaughter? As a raindrop on a willow tree drips into the river and away to sea—so that boy, like a million others, dripped to dust. A little ironical though, that his own side should shoot him, who went to fight for them two years before he need, to shoot him who wouldn't be legal food for powder for another month! A little ironical, perhaps, that he had left this son—legacy to such an implacable world! But there's no moral to a true tale like this—unless it be that the rhythm of life and death cares not a jot for any of us!

The Innkeeper of "The Troubadours"

Love and hate in a Provençal village

By PHILIP GIBBS

IN the heart of the fair country of Provence, in southern France, the ground suddenly rises into a chain of high rocks, dazzling white when the sun gleams upon them, and broken into ridges and sharp-edged cliffs and isolated peaks that stick up like colossal teeth.

A valley, with smooth, green fields and orange groves and clumps of olive trees, lies between these wild and fantastic hills, ending abruptly at a vast wall of rock upon the summit of which stand the ruins of a mediæval fortress, grim and dark against the sky.

A zig-zag path winds up to this old castle and to the ramparts which guard the cliffs around it, and the traveller, taking breath after the steep ascent, finds himself gazing upon the ruins of a famous town perched high between two valleys.

It is utterly abandoned now, and its stones lie scattered about the uneven ground in a woeful chaos. There is no sound of human life here, during many days of the year, but grasshoppers chirrup in the cracks of broken houses, and butterflies flit through windows without casements, and birds build their nests in chimneys through which there comes no smoke.

Half the houses have fallen into mere rubbish heaps, yet still one may trace the streets and squares, the chapels and the shrines of a fortified town where once queens and princesses held their Court of Love, where French knights and lords listened to old tales of chivalry between their own adventures of war and errantry, and where troubadours who had wandered through Provence, from castle to castle, singing as they went, found their richest reward and their most splendid welcome. For this town on the wild rocks above the Happy Valley, as it is still called, was the capital of the Troubadours and of their poet king.

Now it is abandoned, except by travellers who in the summer months come with red guide-books in their hands to scramble over the rocks and search through the ruins, haunted in their imagination by memories of old romance. Its only permanent residents are the grasshoppers who chirrup in the cracks, the butterflies who flit through the roofless houses, and Monsieur Gringot, the innkeeper of "The Troubadours," with his wife and family.

A remarkable man is Hyacinthe Gringot, once of the Chasseurs d'Afrique (that most famous regiment of cavalry) and now innkeeper of "The Troubadours." If you happen to go to this strange, deserted town lying in ruins under the sun of Provence, you will find him strolling outside his inn (it was once the house of a king's lady), carrying his broad-brimmed hat in his hand, so that his tremendous mass of curly white hair (so snow-white above his black eyebrows) is stirred by the soft breeze. Or, if he has his hat on his head, he will sweep it off before you and say, with a most engaging smile and with a distinguished manner: "What a charming day, sir, and how beautiful is the view from this ledge of rock! Will you not come in for a little refreshment after your long climb? They keep good wine at 'The Troubadours' and excellent coffee."

Travellers are surprised at this courteous greeting from a stranger. It is only later that they discover him to be the landlord of the inn. Yet he does not lie about his wine. It is good. And while one drinks it Monsieur Gringot will tell old legends and little tales of history belonging to the ruins (he has learned them by heart), and will intersperse them with sonnets and quatrains in the old language of Provence or in modern French.

"Whose poetry is that?" one asks, and he will smile modestly and thrust his plump

fingers into his white locks and cough a little and say: "Poor trash, sir, that I jot down while waiting for my guests. People call me a poet. They flatter me too much."

If the mistral is blowing (it is a cold breeze that sweeps down from the north west), Monsieur Gringot, the landlord of "The Troubadours," will say: "Come into the *salon*, I beg of you. It is, however, a little untidy because my son-in-law is decorating the walls with his painting."

It is now three years since his son-in-law began to decorate the walls with his painting, and the wood nymphs dancing round a Bacchus in the Happy Valley are still unfinished.

But that is how things go at present, and I have yet to tell how Monsieur Gringot set up his inn in the ruined city of the Troubadours. There is comedy in it, and a touch of tragedy.

For Monsieur Gringot was not always there, and before his inn was established there was another tavern kept by an old man named Bourdin, and called "The Three Queens." It was but a small wine-shop, foul within, and uninviting from without. Centuries old—the Sieur Jehan de Brieux, a famous knight of Provence, lived here once—its walls seemed carved out of the solid rock, and its windows were so small that they could let in but little light.

Yet for many years "The Three Queens" had gained all the custom from travellers to this wild spot, because, you see, there was no other place with a wine-bottle and a glass. So old Bourdin and his wife had done pretty well, and had hoarded up the francs and starved and scraped until they were able to send their son to Paris to be a fine gentleman among the art students in the Latin Quarter. He cost them a pretty penny, too, and was always writing to his parents for more money. But one day he would be a famous artist—he told them so without reserve—and this old couple, so ignorant and lonely, were happy in thinking of his future triumphs. Strange!—but not uncommon among French peasants, who will sacrifice themselves for their sons.

¶

WHILE Henri was away in Paris, old Bourdin and his wife received a terrible blow. Among the travellers who came up the steep pathway was an elderly man with white hair and black eyebrows, who drank a bottle of wine at "The Three Queens," and praised Madame Bourdin's beauty (though she was quite toothless), and asked innumerable questions as to the owner of the ruined houses and the cost of renting one of them. Old Bourdin grunted in reply. He did not like the man's expansive ways. He liked them less when one day the stranger with the white hair and the black eyebrows came with a gang of workmen and took possession of a house immediately opposite "The Three Queens" and commanding the nearest approach from the roadway.

"The lunatic is going to live here," said old Bourdin to his wife. "Anyhow, it will bring more custom to us."

But one morning there appeared above the house where the stranger and his workmen were busy a great signboard with blue letters on a white ground, and old Bourdin read for the first time the name of "The Troubadours"—Hotel-Restaurant. Proprietor, Hyacinthe Gringot.

Old Bourdin was speechless for five minutes. He stared up at that signboard with a face which gradually changed from red to purple. Then he staggered into his own wine-shop, seized his wife by the shoulders, and stammered out a number of horrible curses. "Name of a thousand devils!" That was the least of them.

Later in the day, when he had drunk a good deal of his own bad brandy, old Bourdin came face to face with Hyacinthe Gringot, who was standing at the front door of his new house humming a little song and letting the breeze play about his white hair.

"Good morning, Monsieur Bourdin," said the proprietor of "The Troubadours." "How is your charming and beautiful wife?"

"Name of a pig!" said old Bourdin. "What do you mean by coming here with your ridiculous signboard? I will take the law against you. For twenty-five years I have been the only innkeeper here. Pack off with you or I will know the reason why."

He spluttered and raged, red in the face.

"My friend, there is room for both of us," said Hyacinthe Gringot, "and France is a free country. Come, though we are rivals, let us be friends, you and I."

He held out his hand in his grandest and most persuasive manner, but old Bourdin spat on the ground.

"May the devil take me," he said, "if ever I speak another word to you. Ten thousand curses on you and your inn!"

He raised his claw-like hand and thrust it up with crossed fingers, as though he would blight Hyacinthe Gringot and "The Troubadours" with a malignant spell. Then he shuffled back to his own house of "The Three Queens" and all day long stayed in the dark doorway, blinking out like a toad from its hole.

A few days later, Hyacinthe Gringot brought his wife and daughter to the new inn—a buxom wife with a little black silk cap above her raven tresses, and a young daughter, of eighteen or so, tall and slim, with sparkling dark eyes, and laughter which often rang out through the open windows of "The Troubadours" and worked a madness in the brain of old Bourdin, who seemed to think this laughter mocked at him.

As the weeks and months passed by, and a hot sun shone always down upon the ruined town on the high rocks, old Bourdin watched his rivals and hated them more and more. They were robbers! They were stealing all his custom from him! They were bringing him to ruin!

Whenever travellers came up to the steep pathway—English or Americans with red guide-books, or French artists and men of letters, or holiday-makers from neighbouring towns—there was Hyacinthe Gringot waiting to sweep his hat off to them, to impress them with his abundant white hair and his distinguished black eyebrows, and to beguile men into his inn by his exaggerated courtesies.

Old Bourdin, a gnarled old peasant, could not compete against such a man as Hyacinthe Gringot. Why, the fellow had read up the history of the ruins like any official guide and could rattle off the names and deeds of the famous people who had lived there with a never-ending flow of eloquence! Old Bourdin often listened to his loud sonorous words, telling these stories to a party of visitors, or reciting his own poetry to them, so that they were awe-struck or laughing heartily with him, as though they were his friends rather than customers. He thought nothing of slapping an English milord on the back and calling him "good comrade."

So congenial did the visitors find the company of this landlord of "The Troubadours" that from time to time visitors would stay with him *en pension*, and there would be card parties and singing parties at night in the inn, and old Bourdin would watch their shadows on the red blind in the house opposite—among them the big shadow of Hyacinthe Gringot with his mass of hair—and listen to their voices, shouting with laughter or song—loudest of them being the voice of Hyacinthe Gringot, who sang old songs in the Provençal language. And old Bourdin, watching and listening from his dark inn, from which never a sound came forth, hated the landlord of "The Troubadours" with a deadly hatred.

Another blow struck him when Hyacinthe Gringot built a big shed facing the zig-zag pathway up from the valley and, on a large board, painted the word "Garage" in bold white letters, so that any party of motorists coming to visit the ruins could hardly avoid putting up their car in that place so ostentatiously provided.

Old Bourdin had quarrelled with his wife for forty years, but when she died he remembered the beauty of her girlhood and shed tears and cursed with more than usual violence his hated rivals. They had the insolence to come over to him in his grief to offer their sympathy and their help.

"Get ye gone!" he shouted to them. "You have killed her, robbers as you are! If ye dare to cross my threshold I will strike ye dead."

With his own hands he dug his wife's grave among the ruins and put her old body into the hole and covered it with stones dragged from one of the ruined houses. Then he wrote to his son, Henri, in Paris:

Come and help me to fight against these robbers who have killed your mother and ruined my inn. If you are a man you will help me to get revenge.

Dear Papa (was the answer of Henri, who was not yet thirty years of age),—*I need a little holiday, so that I will come with pleasure. Certainly that Hyacinthe Gringot must be a scoundrel. I am very sorry for poor mamma's death. How much money have you left in the bank?*

One morning, therefore, Henri walked up the Happy Valley and climbed the rock-hewn pathway. His black felt hat with its broad brim was at the back of his head. The long, black tie of an art student fluttered in the breeze. The white dust of the roadway in the Happy Valley had powdered his tight, black trousers and pointed boots.

Henri sang a little music-hall song. His black eyes, burning in a white face, stared

up at the great castle on the rock and at the ramparts of the ruined city, where he had played as a small boy.

"Sacré bleu!" he said. "This is the loneliest place in the world. There is not even one pretty girl to whom I can make love."

Yet, at that very moment, his eyes were startled by the sight of a girl, prettier, he thought, than any he had ever seen before. She was sitting on a ledge of rock just above him, with her hands in her lap, staring with dreamy eyes down into the Happy Valley. They were big, brown eyes in a face like a wood nymph's. Presently they looked at Henri, with a little air of surprise.

Henri was startled. He took off his big, felt hat and said:

"Good day, mademoiselle. Will you be so good as to tell me whether you are a fairy or a mortal woman?"

She said: "I am Thérèse, if you please."

"A charming name!" said Henri. "A pretty name for a pretty girl, mademoiselle."

She laughed, blushed a little and said: "Eh, do you think I'm pretty? If so, you're the first to say so."

"You astonish me," said Henri. "Why, you are as beautiful as one of those fairy creatures who come dancing down the Happy Valley on midsummer night, if we may believe the old tales. By my faith, and with your permission, I will make a sketch of you, before you vanish like magic."

He sat down on a boulder, opened a sketch-book which he had carried under his arm, and sharpened a pencil.

"Tell me," he said, "are you really a wood nymph, or one of those tourists who come to visit the ruins of this old rubbish heap?"

She said: "I am Thérèse Gringot, and my father is the innkeeper of 'The Troubadours.'"

Henri dropped his sketch-book, and his knife and his pencil, and as he sprang to his feet his hat fell off the back of his head.

"Mon Dieu!" he cried. "This is a tragedy!"

"On the contrary, it is very funny!" said Thérèse, laughing at his grotesque attitude. "What is the matter, young man?"

"The matter! The very devil!" cried Henri. "My father is old Bourdin, the innkeeper of 'The Three Queens.' Between your father and mine there is a hatred as poisonous as vipers' tongues. How am I to make love to you, mademoiselle? The thing is impossible—or, at least, most difficult!"

Thérèse sprang to her feet now with a little cry.

"Oh!" she cried, and went running up the street pathway like a fawn disappearing behind the rocks.

Henri picked up his sketch-book, pencil, knife and hat.

He walked slowly up the pathway, until at the top he met an elderly man with silvery locks and black eyebrows and an engaging smile, who swept off his hat with a grand air and said: "Good morning, sir. A noble view from this rampart! You are an artist, I perceive. We have many here."

"A charming old boy!" thought Henri. "And doubtless a tourist with a guide-book in his pocket."

He answered that the view was very fine indeed, but nothing new to him.

"You have been here before?" said Hyacinthe Gringot. "That must have been before the new inn was established. They keep very good wine at 'The Troubadours.'"

"Perhaps," said Henri. "But the landlord is a robber. He is trying to ruin my father, who keeps 'The Three Queens.'"

"Sapristi!" said Hyacinthe Gringot. "As it happens, young man, I am the landlord of 'The Troubadours,' and if you use the word robber again I will squeeze your windpipe between these two fingers."

He held out his thumb and forefinger in such a menacing way that Henri's white face became whiter.

"Sir," said Henri, "I do not desire a quarrel. I wish you a very good day."

He walked quickly over to "The Three Queens," went into its gloom, and found his father adding up figures in his bank-book.

"Good day, papa," said Henri. "I hope I find you in good health."

But old Bourdin was in bad health. He clutched his son's arm and said: "You have not come too soon. Those robbers are ruining me. If you have the spirit even of a grasshopper, you will take revenge upon them."

Into his son's ears he poured out a stream of deadly hatred, like a black and turbulent flood. He cursed Hyacinthe Gringot. He cursed Hyacinthe Gringot's fat wife. He cursed Hyacinthe Gringot's scraggy daughter. He cursed everything that

belonged to Hyacinthe Gringot and, raising his hand, with crossed fingers, he swore that he would curse his son if ever he spoke a word to his enemies, if ever he crossed their threshold, if ever he relaxed his efforts to destroy that nest of vipers.

Henri was alarmed by so many curses.

"But, papa," he said, "what do you wish me to do? How can I destroy our hated rivals?"

Old Bourdin blinked his eyes and breathed hard.

"There is always a way," he said. "I am old and feeble, but you are young and strong. The rocks here are slippery. An accident may happen. Or a shot-gun may go off by mistake. Eh, it would not be surprising to find Hyacinthe Gringot lying dead one day at the bottom of a high peak."

"You desire me to kill him, papa?" asked Henri, in his amiable voice.

Old Bourdin clutched his son's arm again and put his mouth very close to his son's ear.

"Dead men tell no tales," he said.

"I will think the matter over," said Henri. "We must not be in too great a hurry, papa."

¶

THE truth was that Henri was in a most embarrassing position. It was so difficult to murder the father of a girl whom he already loved most passionately, and a man whose charm of manner and generous hospitality were undeniable. For Henri was of a sociable nature and, coming straight from the gay tumultuous life of Paris, he found the silence of this ruined city of the Troubadours most intolerable at night, and his father's conversation most monotonous. In spite of himself he was drawn towards that inn on the opposite side of the roadway, where, as darkness fell, the window blinds glowed red, and from which into the intense silence of night there came the sound of singing voices and hearty laughter.

"Papa," said Henri one evening, "I am going for a long walk to think over the best means of murdering Hyacinthe Gringot. Do not wait up for me, but leave an oil lamp in the window.

Old Bourdin rubbed his hands, and then patted his son on the arm.

"Good boy!" he cried. "Brave lad!"

But Henri crept over in the darkness to "The Troubadours" and pushed open the door very quietly, and stood in the well-lighted room where Hyacinthe Gringot was playing cards with a guest, and where Madame Gringot and Thérèse were knitting lace. The laughter of Hyacinthe Gringot was ringing out and he lifted a cup of wine to his lips as Henri entered.

Hyacinthe Gringot, who had a great heart and much affection for young men, slapped his rival's son on the back, pulled up a chair for him, thrust a bottle of wine under his nose, and said: "Make yourself at home, my lad."

So, night after night, Henri played cards with his father's rival, when he was supposed to be meditating his murder, and sometimes sang little songs of Paris in a low voice so that it should not reach the ears of the old man, who was wondering how soon his boy would do the great deed of revenge.

And, in the day-time, Henri met Thérèse in the Happy Valley and played hide-and-seek with her among the ruined houses and kissed her in the summer house of the Queen Jane, which still stood in the lower meadows below the ramparts.

It happened that one day they were sitting on a ledge of rock overhanging a sheer precipice and, like two love-birds, they twittered endearments to each other.

"My pretty one," said Henri, kicking a pebble over the ledge and listening for its fall far below, "you have the eyes of an angel. I will paint you one day with wings, in a golden halo."

"It is droll," said Thérèse, patting at a cheek. "Every day seemed a week before you came, and now a week seems but a day. How is that, if you please?"

"It is because love makes time run swiftly," said Henri. "If it were not for my old father, we would marry and live as happily as butterflies in summer."

"If your old father could but see us now!" cried Thérèse, laughing.

But her laugh stuck in her throat, for at that moment a shadow overfell the two lovers, and the sound of a strangled cry of rage behind them frightened them. Henri sprang to his feet and, white to the lips, faced old Bourdin. His father looked like a wild beast. He was in a crouching attitude, with his gnarled old hands thrust out as though he would claw at his son's heart. His eyes were bloodshot and there was a little froth about his lips.

Thérèse gave a shriek and ran swiftly down the rock pathway, with her yellow hair streaming backwards.

" Papa ! " said Henri. " What is the matter, dear Papa ? "

Old Bourdin was trying to speak clear words, but his lips mumbled and mouthed in horrible, incoherent rage.

One word only came in a savage cry.

" Traitor ! "

He sprang at his son's throat as though to strangle him ; but Henri, with the fear of death upon him, for he was very close to the edge of the rock, flung himself prone upon the ground and clutched at the tufts of grass.

Old Bourdin fell heavily over his son's body and, as he fell, a boulder gave way before him and he rolled right over the edge of the cliff.

Henri put his white face over the ledge of rock and was in time to see the body of his father crash horribly upon the rocks below.

" Mon Dieu ! " cried Henri.

He picked himself up from the ground, arranged the leaves in his sketch-book, searched round for his india-rubber, and then strolled back to the inn of " The Troubadours."

Hyacinthe Gringot was sitting outside his door, letting the breeze stir his white locks while he jotted down a poem.

" Poor papa has met with an accident," said Henri.

Hyacinthe was searching for a rhyme.

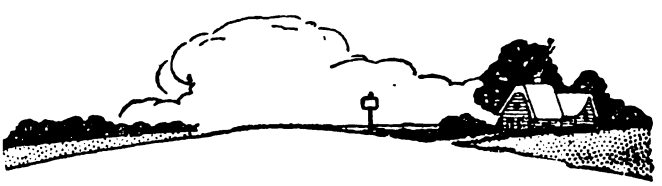
" What is that you say ? " he asked, in an absent-minded way.

" Poor papa has smashed himself to pulp," said Henri. " He tumbled off the rocks and went down crash. I never heard such a bang."

He laughed and laughed, rather hysterically. (He knew that he had been very near to death.) Then he shed a few tears and regretted that God had made him an orphan, with no one to love him in the world. He cheered up a little when he remembered Thérèse.

As it happened, Hyacinthe Gringot was delighted to have him as son-in-law, for old Bourdin, in spite of the rivalry of the new inn, had hoarded up a little fortune of thirty thousand francs, and Henri put it into the business when he married Thérèse.

There is now only one inn at the rock city of the Troubadour. Hyacinthe Gringot still sweeps off his hat to strangers who come up the zig-zag path, and Henri, for three years past, has been painting wood nymphs on the walls of " The Troubadours," while Thérèse works in the kitchen or nurses her baby in the sun.



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The Big Drum

A most amusing matter of degree

By WILLIAM GERHARDI

THE brass band played *Im Köpfle zwei Äugle*, and it seemed to her that the souls of these men were like notes of this music, crying for something elusive, for something in vain. To blare forth one's love on a brass trumpet! An earnest of one's high endeavour fallen short through the inadequate matter of brass; but withal in these abortive notes one felt the presence of the heights the instrument would reach, alas, if it but could!

It touched her to the heart. She would have liked her Otto to play the trumpet instead of the big drum. It seemed more romantic. Otto was not a bit romantic. He was a soldier all right, but he looked more like a man who had started life as a shoemaker's apprentice, had grown old, and was still a shoemaker's apprentice. The band played well—a compact synthetic body—but Otto was a forlorn figure who watched the proceedings with sustained and patient interest and was suffered by them, every now and then, to raise his drumstick and to give a solitary, judicious "Bang!" And he—a tall gaunt man—seemed as though he were ashamed of his small part. And as she watched him she felt a pang of pity for herself: wedded to him, she would be forgotten, while life, indifferent, strode by; and no one in the world would care whether she had her share of happiness before she died. And the music brought this out acutely, as if along the hard stone-paved indifference of life it dragged, dragged on excruciatingly its living bleeding soul. It spoke of loneliness, of laughter, of the pathos, pity and futility of life.

She watched them. The bayonets at their side. The military badges of rank. The hard discipline. And the music seemed to say, "Stop! What are you doing? Why are you doing this?" And thoughts flowed into her mind. Of soldiers dreaming on a Sunday afternoon. A fierce old corporal of whom everyone was afraid talking to her of children and of daisies. Soldiers who, too, had dreams in long waves—of what? she did not know—but not this. And the men who stood up and blew the brass trumpets seemed to say, and the shining trumpets themselves seemed to say: "We were not born for the Army; we were born for something better—though Heaven only knows what it is!"

That was so. Undeniably so. Yet she wished it were otherwise. It helped to make allowances for Otto. Whatever else he lacked, it made her think at least he had a soul. But to be wedded for life to the big drum! She did not fancy the idea. It didn't seem a proper career. But Otto showed no sign of *wanting* to "get on"—even in the orchestra. The most exasperating thing about it all was that Otto showed no sign of even *trying*! She had asked him if he would not, in time, "move on" and take over—say, the double-bass. He did not seem to think it either feasible or necessary. Or *necessary*. He had been with the big drum for close on twelve years. "It's a good drum," he had said. And that was all.

There was no . . . "go" in him. That was it: no go. It was no use denying it. As she watched him—gaunt and spectacled—she wished Otto were more of a man and less of an old maid. The conductor, a boozer with a fat red face full of pimples, some dead and dried up, others still flourishing, was a gallant—every inch a man. He had the elasticity and suppleness and military alertness of the continental military man. She could not tell his rank from the stripes on his sleeves, but thought he must be a major. His heels were high and tipped with indiarubber, and so were straight and smart, but his trousers lacked the footstrap to keep them in position—poor dilapidated Austrian Army! How low it had sunk! Nevertheless they were tight and narrow and showed off the major's calves to advantage. He wore a pince-nez, but a rimless kind, through which gazed a pair of not altogether innocent eyes. But a man and a leader of men. While Otto had

no rubber on his heels. His heels looked eaten away. He wore a pair of spectacles through which he peered from afar at his neighbour's music-stand, and at the appointed time—not one-tenth of a second too late or too early—down came the drumstick with the long-awaited "Bang!" So incidental, so contemptible was Otto's part that, in addition to handling the drum, he had to turn the pages for the man who played the cymbals. It seemed to her humiliating. It was very wrong that Otto had no music-stand of his own.

He smiled shyly, and she turned away, annoyed. The little modiste walked on, meeting the stream of people who promenaded the path surrounding the bandstand; a man on high heels, three girls with a pinched look, a famous Tyrolese basso with a long ruddy beard, a *jeune premier* with whiskers and hair like a wig, whose look appeared to imply: "Here I am." Innsbruck looked morose that Sunday morning, and the military band in the park executed music that was tattered, gross, a little common, yet compelling, even like the daily fare of life. Oh, why were there no heroes? Of course she would have loved to be dominated. That's what men were for. She was a womanly woman. From Vienna. Exalted, brimming over with life. These men of the Tyrol! And as for Otto? Why, she could have only waved her hand!

She began to wonder whether she had not really better break it off with him. If men would but realize how little was required of them. Only an outward gesture of romance: a touch sufficed, the rest would be supplied by woman's powerful imagination. Not even so much. A mere abstention from the cruder forms of clumsiness, a surface effort to conceal one's feeblest worst. A mere semblance of mastery, a glimpse of a will. In short, anything at all that would provide the least excuse for loving him as she so wished to do. A minute she stood, thinking. "A minimum. Hardly as much." There passed along the man on high heels, the three girls with the pinched look, the Tyrolese basso with the long ruddy beard, the *jeune premier* with whiskers and hair like a wig, whose look seemed to say, "Here am I"; then again the man on high heels, the three girls with the pinched look, the Tyrolese singer, and again the *jeune premier* whose look implied, "Here am I." They walked round and round as if the park were a cage and there was nothing to do but walk round—with heads bent, lifeless, sullenly resolute.

The music resumed. She consulted her programme. Item 7. Potpourri from the operette *Die Fledermaus* by Johann Strauss. She returned to the stand, prepared to give her fiancé another chance. Otto's part, as before, was contemptible, more contemptible than before. He was inactive. He smiled shyly. She coloured. And, looking at him, she knew. She knew it was no use, her love could not bridge the chasm. He was despised by the rest of the band. A stick-in-the-mud. Not a man. A poor fish. Not for her. . . .

¶

THE potpourri, as if suddenly turning the corner, broke out into a resounding march, and behold, the big drum now led the way. Bang! bang! bang! bang! Clearly he whacked, never once missing the chance; and the man with the cymbals, as if one heart and brain operated their limbs, clashed the cymbals in astounding unison, the big drum pounding away, pounding away, without cease or respite. And the trumpeters smiled, as who might say: "Good old big drum! You have come into your own at last!" Bang! bang! bang! bang! The big drum had got loud and excited. And all the people standing around looked as though a great joy had come into their lives; and if they had not been a little shy of each other they would have set out and marched in step with the music, taken up *any* cause and, if only because the music implied that all men were brothers, gone forth if need be and butchered another body of brothers, to the tearing, gladdening strains of the march. (Since it is not known from what rational cause men could have marched to the war.)

And if in the park of the neighbouring town there were just such a band with just such a drum which played this same music, the people of the neighbouring town would have marched to this music and exterminated this town. The conductor, like a driver who, having urged his horse over the hill, leans back and leaves the rest to the horse, conceded the enterprise to the drummer, as if the hard, intricate work were now over and he was taking it easy; his baton moved perfunctorily in the wake of the drum, he looked round and acknowledged

the greetings of friends with gay, informal salutes of the left hand, his bland smile freely admitting to all that it was no longer himself but the drum which led them to victory. Or rather, the hard fight had already been won and these, behold, were the happy results! Bang! bang! bang! bang! Strangers passed smiles of intimate recognition, old men nodded reminiscently, small boys gazed with rapt eyes, women looked sweet and bright-eyed, ready to oblige with a kiss; while the big drum, conscious of his splendid initiative, pounded away without cease or respite.

"Wonderful! Beautiful!" said the public surrounding them. And thought:

"Noise is a good thing."

The band had described the first circle and was repeating it with added gusto and deliberation. The drum and the cymbals were pounding, pounding their due through the wholly inadequate blazing of brass. But these did not mind: "Every dog has his day"—and they followed the lead of the drum. He led them. He—Otto! Her Otto was leading them. God! Merciful Virgin! What had she done to deserve such happiness? Otto! . . . And she had doubted him, thought there was no "go" in him. No *go*! She burnt red with shame at the mere thought of it. He was all "go." And didn't he make them go, too, the whole lot of them? How he led them! Puffing, the sweat streaming down their purple faces, they blazed away till their cheeks seemed ready to burst, but Otto out-drummed them— annihilated their efforts. He—Otto! O, God! Watching him, people could hardly keep still. But that none of them stirred and all of them wanted to, added piquancy to the illusion of motion. They stood rooted—while the drum carried on for them: Bang! bang! bang! bang!

"Marvellous!" sighed the public around them.

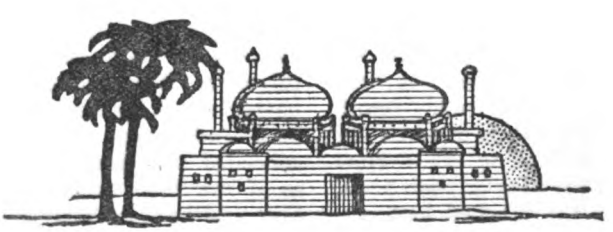
Her Otto—cock of the walk! She could scarcely believe her eyes. Standing in front of the crowd, only a few paces from his side and raising herself on her toes ever so gently in rhythm with the music, so that by the very tininess of her movements she seemed to be sending added impetus into the band, as if, indeed, she were pressing with her little feet some invisible pump, she scanned his face with tenderness, in dumb adoration. And Otto at the drum must have felt it, for, at this turn, he put new life into his thundering whacks: *Bang! bang! bang! bang!* he toiled, and the conductor, as if divining what was afoot, at that moment accelerated the pace of the march.

"Bravo, bravo!" said the people surrounding them.

There was no doubt about it. This was Art. The unerring precision. The wonderful touch. Otto! . . . Otto, as never before, whacked the big drum, whacked it in excitement, in a frenzy, in transcending exaltation. Thundering bangs! And now she knew—what she couldn't have dreamed—she knew it by his face. Otto was a hero. A leader of men. Something fluttered in her breast, as though a bird had flown in, ready to fly out.

"Now it's all over," thought the people, "and we are going home to lunch." And everyone smiled and felt very happy and gay. A sort of prolonged accelerated thundering of the big drum, and then one tremendous BANG!

The thing was over. The conductor raised a bent hand to the peak of his cap, acknowledging the applause. The bird in her fluttered more wildly than ever. She wanted to cry out, but her throat would not obey the urge. She clutched at her heaving breast with eager trembling fingers. "My love," she thought. "My king! My captain! My lord! My padishah!"



The "Colston's" Record Run

How an old-timer of the seas made good

By CAPT. FRANK H. SHAW

"SOME day," said Captain Lovejoy, of the ship *Colston*, "this old hooker will show what she's got in her. Not just yet, of course, because nowadays skippers aren't expected to run the risk of losing their canvas and carrying away their spars; but the old ship's got a turn of speed somewhere about her, and it's bound to come out."

His crony, Captain Merryweather, of the s.s. *Hopeful*, laughed in some derision. The two had sailed together as man and boy for a matter of twenty years, until the exigencies of the sea service had sent them different ways, one remaining true to his old allegiance and adhering to sail, the other, disturbed by new ideas, making tracks for the greater ease and the better pay of steamships. They had foregathered after an absence of some two years from home, and were now standing on the quay at Kiddleston-on-Sea, eyeing the old *Colston* with connoisseurish glances.

"Got her foremast stepped too far forrard for speed," said Captain Merryweather. "She'd run herself under water if you tried to drive her. Don't like the sweep of her sheer—she'll be a dirty ship in any sort of a blow. Too low in the poop as well; let a following sea come round, and she'll be swept clear. I see you've got extra strong steering-gear aft—well, you'll need it."

"I know she isn't a beauty," snorted Captain Lovejoy indignantly, "but there's no need for you to rub it in. Let's see—since we're on with recriminations, how long did it take you to work your box of contraptions round from Antwerp? A fortnight, wasn't it?"

"The *Hopeful* had a fog from the mouth of the Scheldt right to Kiddleston," said Merryweather. "Couldn't go faster than dead slow all the time, and we had to stop every five minutes to see where we were. That's nothing to go by." Lovejoy laughed a trifle sarcastically, and then he seemed to remember that he and his chum had met after a two years' parting, and he smiled with the grave affection that sometimes springs up between men of the sea.

"Come along and have a smoke," he said cheerfully. "My wife'll be glad to see you; and you haven't seen the younger generation either. That's something to look forward to, Merryweather. It makes things a lot different when there's a youngster at home."

"Oh, ho! I heard something about that. So you're a proud and happy father, are you? Well, Lovejoy, I'm not going to blame you, but you know what the sea is for a man with children. You can't serve two masters, you know, and either you'll be thinking too much of the kid or too much of the ship, and one or the other will suffer."

"But how if you put the child aboard the ship and take him with you?"

"You don't go to tell me you're taking the child on your next voyage? Why, man, what's come over you? You're the chap I remember saying that a woman and a child aboard a ship were worse than a head wind down the Eastern. Yes, by gosh! worse than a lee shore in a full gale!"

"Ah, but it's different when you have 'em, Merryweather. I tell you, theories aren't worth a cent.—not theories of that kind, anyway. I've talked over Carboy and Dowells, and they've given me permission to carry the wife and child on this next trip, so I'm going to take 'em. Think of that old *Colston* with those two aboard!"

Captain Lovejoy's austere face softened as a thought crossed his mind. He loved his child with a very deep devotion. The sea demands much from those who serve her—principally she demands a single-hearted allegiance, and in order that her slaves may not be tempted to marry young she has ordained it that their pay shall be meagre, so that men must hesitate before taking on the cares of a household. And Lovejoy loved his first son with all the restrained passion of forty years and more.

"Come on, and let's see the youngster,"

said Captain Merryweather, stumping along with intention. "But if you'll take my advice you won't have him at sea with you. A ship's no place for a child, nor for a woman for that matter."

"A lot you know about it—an old bachelor like you!" Then silence fell as the two veterans ambled along to a quiet little cottage that fronted the bay.

"He's marvellous," agreed Merryweather a few minutes later when he had been introduced to a mite of humanity that seemed composed of cries and wrigglings. "Just like you, Lovejoy. What a voice he's got for a bo'sun! But"—here he shook his head—"he shouldn't go to sea yet awhile. Wait another fifteen years, and then there'll be time enough. Anyhow, I wouldn't send him aboard such a Noah's Ark as the *Colston*. You'll have trouble, mark my words."

Mrs. Lovejoy, young and exceedingly pretty, enthusiastically disclaimed the croakings of her husband's friend.

"It will be the making of Teddy," she said, cuddling the vociferous atom to her breast. "The fresh air will make him grow like lightning. And, besides, how would you like to be left behind for twelve months, Captain Merryweather, if you were a woman?"

"Better than going to sea, ma'am. Much better. Still, I've known Lovejoy here for more years than I care to think of, and he's always steered his own course. I never could persuade him against his will, and only to-day I saw he was just the same stubborn old mule as ever. I was talking to him about the foremast of the *Colston*. Now, I hold that spar's stayed too far forrard, and——" Here the talk developed on purely nautical grounds, and Mrs. Lovejoy lost interest. She was busy cutting out and sewing sundry minute garments that were to do duty aboard the sailing vessel, and every tiny garment had a distinctly nautical cut.

"Take my advice," were Captain Merryweather's parting words, "and don't let 'em come. It's different on a sailing ship. How if anything happened?"

"Nothing will happen, Jonah!" laughed Lovejoy. "The kiddy's as fine a boy as ever stepped, and he'll win through all right. Good-bye. Come down and see us off. We sail this day week." Merryweather departed with many handshakings, and he was observed to stop in the middle of the street, remove his hat and mop his forehead thoughtfully.

"Not aboard the old *Colston*, anyhow," he muttered. "If they wanted anything in a hurry, where would they be? Three knots on a bowline is about her mark. Well, well."

He seemed never to have left off shaking his tousled head all the subsequent week, and he was shaking it when the *Colston* cast off from the quay and slowly trundled down the harbour in the wake of a fussy tug.

"God send the child keeps well," he said, and turned away with a strange obsession of coming evil upon him.

II

"I'VE sailed aboard this old hooker for a matter of twenty years now," remarked the bo'sun of the *Colston*, "but I've never knowed her sail so slow. She's what you might call a bloomin' funeral, and any self-respectin' funeral wouldn't go at this rate. A tarnation glacier would move quicker."

"Well, then, what's the odds?" asked the sailmaker. "Ain't the kiddy gettin' the good o' the long run? Lumme, to see that young 'un puttin' on flesh like a prize pig—why, it's worth anything. Never saw such a kiddy, I didn't. Only this morning he sees me and hanged if he didn't wave his hand at me, right where I was on the crow-jack yard. Knowed me all that length, he did."

"That's nothing," protested the boatswain. "He were a-floppin' up an' down the poop the day afore yestiday, and he crawls up to me and licked the dubbin' off'n my boots. Strike me, but he did. That's affection, if you like."

"I carried him round the poop three times last night in the dorg-watch," struck in a sailor, who was smoking reflectively. "He liked it uncommon. Look here." He removed a shocking cap and showed a minute bald patch on his scalp.

"Pulled a reg'lar fistful o' hair outer there, he did. And kick! Lumme, but he kicked me in the ribs till I couldn't hardly breathe. Oh, he's a wunner, is the skipper's kid."

It was the second dog-watch aboard the *Colston*, and the ship was gently edging her unostentatious way through the trade seas.

Although a fresh breeze was blowing, she appeared to cultivate no indecent haste. The men of the forecastle had foregathered on the after-hatch to discuss the old, yet ever new, topic—the captain's only son. One by one they exchanged reminiscences, and arguments grew heated as man after man claimed some peculiar favour from the " nipper."

" Anyhow, he's a blamed wonder," said the bo'sun, sweeping all arguments aside with authority. " Crikey ! the ship seems to know he's aboard, too. Never a day o' bad weather since we left, and the old tank's behaved handsome. That's just the word—handsome. I wouldn't mind betting she'll run down the Eastern without a wet plank. It's darned strange how some ships seem to know all about what's going on aboard 'em. This ship knows we've got the skipper's son aboard ; she knows he's a-enjoyin' of hisself, so she's taking things easy, so's he can get the benefit. Ships is uncommon like human beings, you mark my word."

" That's a lot o' nonsense," disagreed the sailmaker, who was of an argumentative turn of mind. " Ships is composite conglomerates of iron an' wood an' canvas—principally canvas. They ain't got no sentient souls, they haven't. Just inhanimate protoplasms."

" What's them ? " asked the crew together.

" Read yer Herbert Spencer," said the sailmaker loftily. " He'll tell yer more'n I can."

Eight bells struck aft, and the watches mustered on the quarter-deck.

" Let the youngster muster them," said Captain Lovejoy proudly, as the mate ran to the head of the poop ladder. The child was brought along in his mother's arms, and the men burst into a hearty laugh as a constant refrain of " goo-goo " proceeded from the scarlet lips.

" That'll do the watch," said the mate smilingly. " Don't cheer so loud, boys ; you'll excite the kid." Peace reigned aboard the *Colston* as she floated leisurely along under the tropic stars.

" No, she's not breaking records," agreed Lovejoy an hour later as he paced the poop alongside the mate. " But I still hold to it that the old ship's got a marvellous turn of speed about her somewhere. I believe there's a lot more about a ship than most people think. She gets something of her designer's soul into her."

" The man who designed the *Colston* must have taken the cake for laziness," grumbled the mate. " It isn't as if it was a calm, sir. It's an eight-knot breeze, and she's barely logging four. Heart-breaking, I call it."

" You wait a bit," said the skipper. " She'll get her chance some day, and she'll teach some people a thing or two in the way of speed."

" Wish she'd start in, then," was all Mr. Catharpings vouchsafed to say.

Captain Lovejoy little thought, as he made his way below and hung entrancedly over the crib where lay his son, that his words would be proved only too dreadfully true ere many days had passed. The old ship creaked a little as he and his wife stood hand in hand beside the crib, and from some loose beam there came an eerie moaning sound. Mrs. Lovejoy shivered, and drew her lace shawl more closely about her shoulders.

" A premonition of coming evil," was her mental remark, but she took courage when she felt the fond clasp of her husband's sunburnt fingers.

" It would take a lot to harm him," said Lovejoy. " I've never seen a healthier child in my life. We'll make a sailor of him, Mamie."

" Don't ! " cried his wife with a sudden vibrating passion in her voice. " Don't tempt Providence, Jack. Let's be humble and meek. What if anything happened now—here out at sea ? It's terrible to think of ! "

" Nothing will happen," said the skipper stoutly. " The old hooker knows our boy's aboard, and she'll take care of him."

III

" TEDDY doesn't seem so well, Jack."

" He's all right, Mamie. Can't expect the child to be bouncing and generally glorious every day and all day. Expect he's been eating too much."

But though Captain Lovejoy spoke with an affectation of carelessness, his soul was disquieted within him. There was undoubtedly something wrong with the child. He was flushed and restless, his breath came unevenly, short ; spasmodic cries were jerked from his parched lips, one tiny hand was thrown upwards as though to still an insistent pain in the head.

"It's only his teeth," said Lovejoy. "They say it takes them no end of different ways."

"Jack, I'm afraid." The mother's face had become white and drawn, and beginnings of a growing terror showed in her starting eyes. "We're so far away from a doctor. What if there should be something serious—what if the boy should—— Oh, Jack, what if the boy should die!" Her breath was coming fitfully now, one hand was clutching at the bosom of her dress.

"Cheer up, lass. Maybe he's only a bit fretful. I'll get the book out of the medicine chest and read up what it says about the case."

"Why did I ever come to sea with the boy? It's a shame. Hundreds of miles from a doctor and perhaps the child is dying! Jack, if anything happens to that boy I'll go mad or drown myself."

"Quietly, lass. You sit there and I'll get the book." Lovejoy opened the lid of the medicine chest and ferreted out the well-thumbed medical treatise supplied by regulations to every deep-sea ship. He scanned the stained pages thoughtfully, but found a surprising lack of information on the subject of infantile ailments. The subjects treated of at length were chiefly diseases peculiar to sailor-men. He scanned the book through from ague to yellow fever, and found no comfort. But before he had turned the last page the child had undoubtedly grown worse.

Lovejoy's heart sank within him as he reflected what the future might hold. At least five hundred miles separated the *Colston* from the nearest land, six hundred miles stretched between the ship and her legitimate destination. And the ship had lagged sorely during the whole of that easy-going voyage. The stiff following gales that had volleyed in their wake right from Tristan d'Acunha up to now had failed to stir the old craft to anything more than a sluggish crawl. She seemed dead, inert, worn-out, as though the weight of her years was heavy upon her. Six hundred miles to go before a doctor could be found, and the *Colston* almost at a standstill!

"Let me look at the boy." Lovejoy took up the little fretful one and searched the pain-drawn face. Then he laid his son down and mixed a rough-and-ready mixture out of the bottles at his disposal. The mixture had a soothing effect, and the child fell into a sleep that was broken occasionally by a pitiful cry. "Give him a little more if he wakens," were the skipper's last words as he laid the child down on the settee. "I'm going on deck."

He found the entire crew of the ship clustered at the break of the poop. The mate met him half way up the companion with an unasked question in his eyes.

"The boy's bad," said Lovejoy briefly. "We've got to get a doctor for him somehow. This ship's got to move as she's never moved before."

"Not much use stopping a liner down here," said the mate sympathetically, "because we shan't see any. They don't run so far south. Well, sir, we'll do our best. Is the boy very bad?" Lovejoy whispered something, and the mate pursed his lips into a soundless whistle.

"As bad as all that! By Jove!" But the skipper did not hear him. He had walked to the break of the poop, to where the waiting men were straining every nerv to get the latest news.

"My son's very ill, men," he said sharply. "Very ill indeed. I'm afraid he's near his——" His voice broke off on the last word, but there was no need for its repetition. "We've got to have a doctor for him inside two days. This ship's got to move as she's never moved in her life. Hands to the braces. Look alive, you crowd of loafers! Sailmaker!"

"Yes, sir."

"Take three or four hands with you and get those spare sails on deck. Rig bonnets under every sail that's set. Splice extra strong ear-rings into every rag we have and look to it that the robands are doubled. Carpenter!"

"Sir."

"Get those spare spars rigged up as stuns'l booms. Mr. Catharpings, these men have to work as they've never worked in their lives. I'm going to show that the old *Colston* has it in her to make a record run. Lose no time."

The boatswain took off his cap and shuffled his feet nervously.

"Speakin' for the crowd, sir," he said huskily, "I wants to say as how there won't be no need for hustling. We're that—that taken up with the kid, sir, that we'd work our fingers down to wire-shreds sooner nor what nothing should happen to him. Why, dash your eyes, sir, we're——" Somehow the boatswain's voice could not be controlled. He passed one hand across his eyes and turned away.

"Look alive, ye sodgers!" he yelled. "It's the kid's life you're working for, look ye! Get a move on!"

The men needed neither threats nor promises. They raced to the braces, flung them recklessly on deck and hauled the yards square to the booming breeze. The *Colston* seemed to thrill from stem to stern with a new life as the first racing comber took her under the counter and smothered her poop with high-washed spray. Captain Lovejoy gripped a swifter, and his heart swelled within him.

"The old ship knows," he said huskily. "She knows it's a race for life."

"Looks like it," agreed the mate. "She's put on an extra two knots already. Look alive, you swabs there!"

There was no wish to look anything else but alive on the part of the crew. They were flying to and fro as busy as bees, working with that orderly activity that characterises the British seaman when his best instincts are aroused. They were men who would loaf and malinger unblushingly in fine weather, who would steal whole hours of a watch on deck in surreptitious smokes, to the dismay of the officers, but they were also men who would fling out a lifeboat without more than a single word to hasten to the rescue of those perishing in deep waters. And here was no unknown ship's company to be saved. Their darling, the tiny mite who was the joy of their lives, lay at death's door, and by hook or by crook he had to be snatched back from that dread portal.

The sailmaker—hoarse-voiced and troubled with a strange agitation—swore fluently at the men he had chosen, and bade them work with redoubled energy. They answered him as hounds answer the horn, and in an incredibly short time they had ripped and sewn the spare canvas below, until "bonnets" had been manufactured in sufficient number to lace one beneath every sail that was spread. They dragged the improvised affairs forth and sent the word along the decks, so that all hands came racing forward, snatched up the unwieldy affairs and ran with them to the main and fore mast like hurrying ants.

Half-a-dozen men sprang aloft on wings of light, the canvas followed them, and before night fell down the *Colston* was bounding along, her lee scuppers humming the mad refrain of speed that tells the practised ear the log is recording over twelve knots an hour. And from the main deck came the thud of the carpenter's adze, and he and his crew toiled like beavers at the spare spars, shaping them to their new requirements. Night fell, and brought no cessation in that maddening toil. No man thought of sleep, and not until exhausted nature refused to answer to the demands made upon her did any man think of food. It was Captain Lovejoy himself who demanded that they should cease work for at least an hour, that they might be fitted for what was still to come.

"We're doing all we can," he explained to a dry-eyed, white-faced woman who walked the cabin ceaselessly, crooning over the fevered bundle in her arms. "We're making the old hooker fly, Mamie. She's got it in her, as I always said, and it's coming out now."

"It will be too late, Jack," was all Mrs. Lovejoy could answer; and the pitiful parade was resumed, while the crooning voice faltered and grew weak, only to rise again in a welling flood of renewed hope as the *Colston* seemed to spring to the thrust of the gale like a hunted stag.

¶

ON deck again went Lovejoy, and his stentorian voice brought the men along at a run.

"You've got to work, boys. Get those spars up aloft now. Never mind about the irons. Lash 'em to the yard-arms with rope. Hurry, if you ever hurried in your lives."

They were gasping for breath; they were scarred and bleeding in a hundred places, but they toiled on to gantline and lashing like heroes, until—no man could say afterwards how the work was done—the improvised stuns'l yards were up, and the rudely-shaped sails were spread. The wind had hauled a little by this time, and the *Colston* had found her best sailing point.

Carrying that mighty spread of canvas, she smoked through the tortured water like a steamer. The green waves bent their white-capped heads to give her right of way, rising astern as she trod them underfoot, to watch in amazement the wonderful sight of her advance. For the *Colston* knew—ay, she knew if ever a ship knew anything—what was required of her, and she was doing her best to be worthy of the trust that one man had placed in her.

The "Colston's" Record Run

A full moon silvered the swelling bosoms of the towering sails. The water sparkled brightly along her dripping sides, there were weird reflections from her wave-washed decks. The ship was thrilling with life. She tossed her head in proud abandon as wave after wave roared up, cowered beneath her mighty onward sweep, and was flung astern in a broth of creamy foam. Every rope added its whisper to the glorious chorus of speed that the gallant ship sang, the thrash of the wind in the caverns of her sails was like the loud detonation of nearby artillery.

Onwards she went, that glorious ship, onwards and still onwards, though the elements conspired together to check her impetuous progress. She would not be checked. She scorned her puny enmity and made light of their pitfalls. There was no peace on board all that hastening structure now. A constant wash of water from cat-head to poop made her decks dangerous to human foot, but men dashed through the spray heedlessly, clinging, gasping and spluttering, to pin rail and brace-block as the great waves tore inboard, racing like madmen to their stations when the decks cleared momentarily.

And all the while Captain Lovejoy paced the poop feverishly, racking his brain for new devices to wring yet another inch of speed from the ship in which he had put his trust.

"She can't stand this for long, sir." Mr. Catharpings was a sailor to the core, but even his staunch soul was aghast at the rough handling the *Colston* was receiving. "She'll carry something away if she hits along at this gait much more. Better get those royals down, sir, and reef in the mainsail. If it comes on to blow harder—and it looks like it—the crew won't be enough to handle her."

"Getting afraid?" Lovejoy snapped out the words in white, uncontrollable anger. The man was on a fine edge of nervous apprehension, and was scarcely responsible for his actions.

"I'm not afraid," said the mate, with a crimson flush on his hard face, "but I know you're courting disaster if you run the ship like this."

"Call the hands aft, Mr. Catharpings."

They came along, drenched to the skin, cursing volubly, but withal they were undismayed.

"Men, they say we're driving the old hooker too hard. Is there one of you thinks that? Say so if there is."

There was not a word from the coughing throng.

"Then, by heaven! we'll run her till she can't run longer. Get a pull of the weather braces, there, and see if we can't make her hum."

Dawn broke wanly and revealed a scene that should have struck dismay into the hearts of the *Colston's* crew, but they laughed croakingly, and cheered the ship with their remnants of breath. She was doing wonderfully now. Bounding from wave crest to wave crest, she spurned the seas behind her with an arrogant heel.

A gust smote down out of the storm-filled sky, and she leaned proudly over to the thrust, over and over until the clews of her courses dripped with salt. The waves curled over in her lee bulwarks, and tore along the decks like a cascade, but she bided her time, made no attempt to struggle uselessly, and then, when the greatest force of the squall was over, lifted herself again and sped on with still freshened life and vigour.

Ay, she knew what was required of her. She knew that down there in the stuffy cabin, watched by burning eyes, prayed over by parched, bitten lips, lay one whose life depended upon her speed. And she answered every call with a fine nobility.

"She's logged a hundred and sixty knots since eight o'clock last night," said the second mate wonderingly when he read off the patent log on the taffrail. "That's an average of sixteen knots right through the night. Six o'clock now, sir. If she keeps up this gait she'll be in Adelaide by to-morrow afternoon."

"She'll do more yet," answered Lovejoy, who clung to the swifter like a man in a trance. "I tell you, she knows."

All through that day the *Colston* laid her nose down to it and smoked along most nobly. There was no diminution in her headlong speed; if anything, as day brought a stronger breeze she added to her pace, until men who had seen her in her prime stood aghast and wondered. It was inconceivable, this triumphant overcoming of all obstacles. By all the laws of the sea the *Colston* should have gone down under this awful strain, but instead of that, as though quickened to the very heart, she made light of her troubles and proudly laughed all opposition to scorn.

¶

IT was close on midnight when the carpenter, pallid and breathless, flung himself upon the iron-willed skipper and gasped out his tidings of evil.

"She's leaking like a sieve, sir. Must be strained fore and aft. Six feet of water in the hold, sir, and rising like mad."

"Then pump!" Lovejoy's voice rang out like a defiance to death himself. "Call all hands to the pumps till you drop!"

The men were worn out with their superhuman exertions, but they answered the call. All through that night the scuppers ran with evil-smelling bilge-water, and the clank of the pumps rang back in echo to the strident note of the howling storm. Men fainted where they stood, and were dragged away by fresher men, who in their turn dropped gasping, only to be replaced by yet others, until the black night faded into the pallid hues of dawn, as though astounded at such a combat against time and death.

"Eight feet of water, sir," reported the carpenter at seven o'clock.

"Still doing sixteen knots," reported the mate at eight bells.

It was a question now as to which would win. The ship, flying like a racehorse on the straight run home, or the stealthy water creeping in through a hundred gaping seams. Lovejoy hastened down to the cabin and looked at his boy. The fever was nearing its height now, and the little fellow writhed in awful pain. Mrs. Lovejoy was doing what she knew to alleviate the distress, but it was little. She was a young woman, Teddy was her first child, and with all the will in the world she had not the knowledge that should teach her how best to act.

"Serve hot grog round," cried Lovejoy as he hastened back to the deck. The steward heard and obeyed, and the potent spirit flogged the drooping strength of the crew into violent activity. Blinded by their sweat, aching and sore, they toiled at the clanking pumps, and the water gushed forth in torrents. Lovejoy himself ran down to the main deck, and encouraged those who weakened with voice and action. His strength was as the strength of ten; his spirit was risen high. Nobly he slaved, and the men, seeing how their captain worked, worked with all their inner resources of strength, growling and panting encouragement one to the other as their voices failed them.

Under ordinary conditions no man could have imbibed the powerful grog in such draughts as did these struggling men, but they felt no slightest sense of intoxication. Rather they were sober and morose by this, for there had crept an insidious doubt into their minds that told them all their efforts were of no avail. How the rumour grew none might say. But someone whispered croakingly that the child was worse.

That was what they needed. They were Englishmen, men who never fought better than in a losing fight. They howled frenziedly as they flung themselves upon the pump handles, and the *Colston* urged them to still more strenuous exertions as she quickened her pace perceptibly and swept through the sea-broth like a meteor through the Milky Way.

"Land oh!" The cry rang along the decks like a cry of victory.

It was growing late in the afternoon, but those who gazed with straining eyes could see a dot of white shining ahead, and the men whispered together, saying that that was the lighthouse, and that port was in sight.

The *Colston* checked in her onward career as the strong wind lulled, but she still went along at a great pace. The sailors still tore at the pumps, cursing in voices that could not be heard, but they said the fight was drawing to a close and—the child still lived.

A stream of flags fluttered upwards to the *Colston's* peak, and stood out like boards against the spanker. It was a summons of urgent need, and those in the lighthouse who read the signal sent the message speeding onwards. So that when the gallant ship rounded-to at her moorings and the strained sails fell limply back upon the masts, a fast-steaming launch fussed up to her gangway and deposited a clean-shaven, alert-faced man on the lowest platform. This newcomer darted to the deck as though propelled by some invisible force.

"You the captain? What's wrong?" He eyed the white-faced man who clutched nervously at his hand with some dismay, and wondered what new trouble of mind he had to face.

"Down below here. It's the child."

Captain Lovejoy almost fell upon the doctor's breast as he gasped out the words, swayed drunkenly and fell prone on the

deck as the medical man vanished hurricane-wise down the companionway. But the mate dashed water over him, so that he rose uncertainly and groped his way below.

"Yes, very, very bad indeed. Couldn't have lived another two hours," was the doctor's verdict. "But I think we've got it in time. I'll give him a stimulant now, and then we'll bundle the little chap up in the blankets and get him ashore into hospital. What's that you say? The ship's saved him? How do you mean?"

Captain Lovejoy stammered out his tale, and the doctor, busy at his work, heard in amazement.

"Yes, it must have been the ship," he said. "I tell you, another two hours of this fever would have been fatal. As it is, we've got a chance. Yes, a dashed good chance! In fact, I don't mind wagering my professional reputation that we'll save the child. Hello, hold up!"

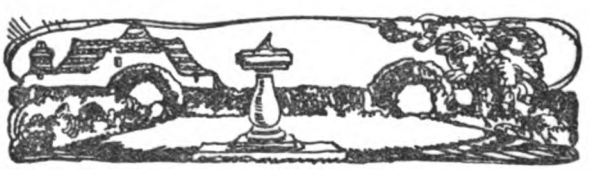
But Captain Lovejoy had not fainted again. He had lurched forward to clasp the drooping figure of his wife in his arms, and the woman's sobs of gratitude rose loudly in the cabin. Of a sudden Lovejoy broke loose and flashed up on deck. The men were there, clustered about the door of the companion-way, respectful, eager, worn out.

"Yes, boys, thanks to the ship and to you, he'll live."

The ships at anchor near by wondered what was the reason of that husky, struggling yet triumphant cheer that rattled over the still waters of the harbour, but before it had died away the fatigued sailors were using up their last remnants of strength to rig up a cradle to transport the child to the waiting launch. They lined the rails, a gaunt and spectre-like crew, as the launch darted away, and the sound of their rejoicings carried to the distant shore.

But that night the poor, overstrained *Colston* paid the price of her mad race against time. Her wearied seams opened widely and the sea she had defied crept in insidiously, so that the cry went round in the night watches that she was foundering at her moorings.

They got clear in the nick of time, and from hastily-lowered boats, watched the gallant old craft die nobly. She had broken her record, but had broken her staunch old heart at the last.



The Enchantment

I DID but look and love awhile,
'Twas but for one half-hour;
Then to resist I had no will,
And now I have no power.

To sigh and wish is all my ease;
Sighs which do heat impart
Enough to melt the coldest ice,
Yet cannot warm your heart.

O would your pity give my heart
One corner of your breast,
'Twould learn of yours the winning art,
And quickly steal the rest.

THOMAS OTWAY.

The Earth Grows Young Again

Voices of Spring

HOW do the blackbird and throstle with their melodious voices bid welcome to the cheerful Spring, as in their fixed mouths warble forth such ditties as no art or instrument can reach to! Nay, the smaller birds also do the like in their particular seasons, as namely the laverock, the titlark, the little linnet, and the honest robin, that loves mankind both alive and dead. But the nightingale, another of my airy creatures, breathes such sweet loud music out of her little instrumental throat, that it might make mankind to think miracles are not ceased. He that at midnight, when the very labourer sleeps securely, should hear, as I have very often, the clear airs, the sweet descants, the natural rising and falling, the doubling and redoubling of her voice might well be lifted above earth and say: "Lord, what music hast Thou provided for the saints in heaven, when Thou affordest bad men such music on earth?"

Izaak Walton.

THE chestnut is a candlestick
Of arching clusters, rosy and thick,
And branches branching wide and high
Toward the smiling sky.

Closed are the sweet-lip buds that hide
A flame of mother-o'-pearl inside.
Open, open, O rosy mouth!
The wind is from the south.

O wind, from Spring's own country blow,
Till all the candles lit a-row,
And all the candles lit a-ring,
Make Christmas trees for Spring.

Katharine Tynan.

The Golden Age

AS every season seems best to us in its turn, so the coming in of Spring is like the creation of Cosmos out of Chaos, and the realisation of the Golden Age.

Henry David Thoreau.

Days That are Worth Years

IT has been said that in human life there are moments worth ages. In a more subdued tone of sympathy may we affirm, that in the climate of England there are, for the lover of Nature, days which are worth whole months—I might say, even years. One of these favoured days sometimes occurs in Spring-time, when that soft air is breathing over the blossoms and new-born verdure, which inspired Buchanan with his beautiful Ode to the First of May; the air, which, in the luxuriance of his fancy, he likens to that of the golden age—to that which gives motion to the funereal cypresses on the banks of Lethe;—to the air which is to salute beatified spirits when expiatory fires shall have consumed the earth with all her habitations.

William Wordsworth.

Sights and Sounds of the Season

ITS voices and swift movements have come back also. The swallow shoots by us, like an embodied ardour of the season. The glowing bee has his will of the honeyed flowers, grappling with them as they tremble. We have not yet heard the nightingale or the cuckoo; but we can hear them with our imagination, and enjoy them through the content of those who have. Then the young green. This is the most apt and perfect mark of the season—the true issuing forth of the Spring. The trees and bushes are putting forth their crisp fans; the lilac is loaded with bud; the meadows are thick with the bright young grass, running into sweeps of white and gold with the daisies and buttercups. The orchards announce their riches in a shower of silver blossoms. The earth in fertile woods is spread with yellow and blue carpets of primroses, violets and hyacinths, over which the birch-trees, like stooping nymphs, hang with their thickening hair. Lilies of the valley, stocks, columbines, lady-smocks and the intensely red peony, which seems to anticipate the full glow of summer-time, all come out to wait upon the season, like fairies from their subterraneous palaces.

LEIGH HUNT.

The All-Tolerant Sun

LIKE an ocean of life spring overfloods the earth; the white blossom-foam hangs on the trees; all is bathed in a hazy glow; in the town the windows of the houses flash in sunlight, and on the roofs the sparrows are at work on their nests; in the streets the town folk are abroad, remarking how crisp the air is, and how wonderfully it suits them; the gaily-dressed peasant girls are selling bunches of violets; the Foundling children, with their blue jackets and their pretty base-born faces, are passing along the Jungfern-steg, radiant as though each will find a father to-day; the beggar on the bridge looks as contented as if he had won the grand prize in the lottery; even the dark unhung villain of a broker, with his rascally shoddy face, as he passes me, catches some rays of the all-tolerant sun.

HEINRICH HEINE.

TO-DAY, behold, the jubilant sun
Scatters the stifling dread!
We see the stately river run,
The blue's clear overhead.
Almost across the bustling ways
There comes a breath of Spring;
The gaunt trees stir themselves in praise,
The very housetops sing!

C. KENNETT BURROW.

Hill and Valley, Mead and Pasture

THERE were hills which garnished their proud heights with stately trees; humble valleys whose base estate seemed comforted with the refreshing of silver rivers; meadows enamelled with all sorts of eye-pleasing flowers; thickets which, being lined with most pleasant shade, were witnessed so to by the cheerful disposition of many well-tuned birds; each pasture stored with sheep, feeding with sober security, while the pretty lambs, with bleating oratory, craved the dam's comfort.

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY.

A Magic Influence

WHAT man is there, over whose mind a bright Spring morning does not exercise a magic influence—carrying him back to the days of his childish sports, and conjuring up before him the old green field with its gently waving trees, where the birds sang as he has never heard them since—where the butterfly fluttered far more gaily than he ever sees him now, in all his ramblings—where the sky seemed bluer, and the sun shone more brightly—where the air blew more freshly over greener grass, and sweeter smelling flowers —where everything wore a richer and more brilliant hue than it is ever dressed in now !

Charles Dickens.

I KNOW a garden most forget,
An ancient garden small and fair,
That seems a little heaven on earth
Within a gaunt and crumbling square;
It smiles among the roaring streets,
A hidden nook, alone, apart,
A cage that's full of country dreams
Caught in the sombre City's heart.

The garden, when its twinkling flowei
Are jewelled by some April sky,
Brightens, a charted treasure ground
That snares the loitering passer-by.

A. St. John Adcock.

Nature's Spirit-Stirring Chorus

THE lowing of the cattle as they luxuriate in the green fields ; the bleating of the sheep from the heath-clad hills, while their new-dropt lambs sport around them, exulting in the consciousness of young existence ; the hum of the industrious bees, as they fly from flower to flower collecting their sweet food ; and the varied notes of love and joy, pouring from bush and brake, all unite in one harmonious and spirit-stirring chorus. Nay, inanimate Nature itself seems conscious of the general joy—and as the sun breaks forth from the April shower, every blade of grass sparkles in his beams, wood and mead smile, and the very silence of the clear heavens and swelling earth utters the voice of enjoyment.

Henry Duncan.

All that is Enjoyable

THE Spring affords to a mind, so free from the disturbance of cares or passions as to be vacant to calm amusements, almost every thing that our present state makes us capable of enjoying. The variegated verdure of the fields and woods, the succession of grateful odours, the voice of pleasure pouring out its notes on every side, with the gladness apparently conceived by every animal, from the growth of his food, and the clemency of the weather, throw over the whole earth an air of gaiety, significantly expressed by the smile of Nature.

Samuel Johnson.

Cheerfulness as Thanksgiving

I WOULD have my readers endeavour to moralise this natural pleasure of the soul, and to improve this vernal delight, as Milton calls it, into a Christian virtue. When we find ourselves inspired with this pleasing instinct, this secret satisfaction and complacency arising from the beauties of the creation, let us consider to whom we stand indebted for all these entertainments of sense, and who it is that thus opens his hand, and fills the world with good. The Apostle instructs us to take advantage of our present temper of mind, to graft upon it such a religious exercise as is particularly conformable to it, by that precept which advises those who are sad to pray, and those who are merry to sing psalms. The cheerfulness of heart which springs up in us from the survey of Nature's works is an admirable preparation for gratitude. Joseph Addison.

Enjoy the Present

THE breath of the eastern breeze is scattering its musky odours; the old world hath once more renewed its youth!

The syringa is presenting its onyx-cup to the jessamine; the eye of the narcissus is darting its glances towards the anemone.

O my heart, if the delights of the day thou castest away till the morrow, who will be the surety for the ready-capital of life which is still left thee?

Hafiz.

Typical of Progress

ALAS for the worn and heavy soul if, whether in youth or age, it have outlived its privilege of Spring-time sprightliness! From such a soul the world must hope no reformation of its evil, no sympathy with the lofty faith and gallant struggles of those who contend in its behalf. Summer works in the present, and thinks not of the future; autumn is a rich conservative; winter has utterly lost its faith, and clings tremulously to the remembrance of what has been; but Spring, with its outgushing life, is the true type of the movement.

Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Consecrated Spirit of Hope

IT is not merely the multiplicity of tints, the gladness of tone, or the balminess of the air which delight in the Spring; it is the still consecrated spirit of hope, the prophecy of happy days yet to come; the endless variety of nature, with presentiments of eternal flowers which never shall fade, and sympathy with the blessedness of the ever-developing world. Novalis.

NOW Nature hangs her mantle green
On every blooming tree,
And spreads her sheets o' daisies white
Out o'er the grassy lea.

Burns.

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The Three Strangers

Concerning a meeting before the appointed hour

By THOMAS HARDY

AMONG the few features of agricultural England which retain an appearance but little modified by the lapse of centuries, may be reckoned the high, grassy and furzy downs, coombs, or ewe-leases, as they are indifferently called, that fill a large area of certain counties in the south and south-west. If any mark of human occupation is met with hereon, it usually takes the form of the solitary cottage of some shepherd.

Fifty years ago such a lonely cottage stood on such a down, and may possibly be standing there now. In spite of its loneliness, however, the spot, by actual measurement, was not more than five miles from a county-town. Yet that affected it little. Five miles of irregular upland, during the long inimical seasons, with their sleets, snows, rains, and mists, afford withdrawing space enough to isolate a Timon or a Nebuchadnezzar; much less, in fair weather, to please that less repellent tribe, the poets, philosophers, artists, and others who "conceive and meditate of pleasant things."

Some old earthen camp or barrow, some clump of trees, at least some starved fragment of ancient hedge is usually taken advantage of in the erection of these forlorn dwellings. But, in the present case, such a kind of shelter had been disregarded. Higher Crowstairs, as the house was called, stood quite detached and undefended. The only reason for its precise situation seemed to be the crossing of two footpaths at right angles hard by, which may have crossed there and thus for a good five hundred years. Hence the house was exposed to the elements on all sides. But, though the wind up here blew unmistakably when it did blow, and the rain hit hard whenever it fell, the various weathers of the winter season were not quite so formidable on the coomb as they were imagined to be by dwellers on low ground. The raw rimes were not so pernicious as in the hollows, and the frosts were scarcely so severe. When the shepherd and his family who tenanted the house were pitied for their sufferings from the exposure, they said that upon the whole they were less inconvenienced by "wuzzes and flames" (hoarses and phlegms) than when they had lived by the stream of a snug neighbouring valley.

The night of March 28, 182–, was precisely one of the nights that were wont to call forth these expressions of commiseration. The level rainstorm smote walls, slopes, and hedges like the clothyard shafts of Senlac and Crécy. Such sheep and outdoor animals as had no shelter stood with their buttocks to the winds; while the tails of little birds trying to roost on some scraggy thorn were blown inside-out like umbrellas. The gable-end of the cottage was stained with wet, and the eavesdroppings flapped against the wall. Yet never was commiseration for the shepherd more misplaced. For that cheerful rustic was entertaining a large party in glorification of the christening of his second girl.

The guests had arrived before the rain began to fall, and they were all now assembled in the chief or living room of the dwelling. A glance into the apartment at eight o'clock on this eventful evening would have resulted in the opinion that it was as cosy and comfortable a nook as could be wished for in boisterous weather. The calling of its inhabitant was proclaimed by a number of highly-polished sheep-crooks without stems that were hung ornamentally over the fireplace, the curl of each shining crook varying from the antiquated type engraved in the patriarchal pictures of old family Bibles to the most approved fashion of the last local sheep-fair. The room was lighted by half-a-dozen candles, having wicks only a trifle smaller than the grease which enveloped them, in candlesticks that were never used but at high-days, holy-days, and family feasts. The lights were scattered about the room, two of them standing on the chimney-piece. This position of candles

was in itself significant. Candles on the chimney-piece always meant a party.

On the hearth, in front of a back-brand to give substance, blazed a fire of thorns, that crackled " like the laughter of the fool."

Nineteen persons were gathered here. Of these, five women wearing gowns of various bright hues, sat in chairs along the wall; girls shy and not shy filled the window-bench; four men, including Charley Jake the hedge-carpenter, Elijah New the parish-clerk, and John Pitcher, a neighbouring dairyman, the shepherd's father-in-law, lolled in the settle; a young man and maid, who were blushing over tentative *pourparlers* on a life-companionship, sat beneath the corner-cupboard; and an elderly engaged man of fifty or upward moved restlessly about from spots where his betrothed was not to the spot where she was. Enjoyment was pretty general, and so much the more prevailed in being unhampered by conventional restrictions. Absolute confidence in each other's good opinion begat perfect ease, while the finishing stroke of manner, amounting to a truly princely serenity, was lent to the majority by the absence of any expression or trait denoting that they wished to get on in the world, enlarge their minds, or do any eclipsing thing whatever—which nowadays so generally nips the bloom and *bonhomie* of all except the two extremes of the social scale.

Shepherd Fennel had married well, his wife being a dairyman's daughter from a vale at a distance, who brought fifty guineas in her pocket—and kept them there, till they should be required for ministering to the needs of a coming family. This frugal woman had been somewhat exercised as to the character that should be given to the gathering. A sit-still party had its advantages; but an undisturbed position of ease in chairs and settles was apt to lead on the men to such an unconscionable deal of toping that they would sometimes fairly drink the house dry. A dancing-party was the alternative; but this, while avoiding the foregoing objection on the score of good drink, had a counterbalancing disadvantage in the matter of good victuals, the ravenous appetites engendered by the exercise causing immense havoc in the buttery. Shepherdess Fennel fell back upon the intermediate plan of mingling short dances with short periods of talk and singing, so as to hinder any ungovernable rage in either. But this scheme was entirely confined to her own gentle mind: the shepherd himself was in the mood to exhibit the most reckless phases of hospitality.

The fiddler was a boy of those parts, about twelve years of age, who had a wonderful dexterity in jigs and reels, though his fingers were so small and short as to necessitate a constant shifting for the high notes, from which he scrambled back to the first position with sounds not of unmixed purity of tone. At seven the shrill tweedle-dee of this youngster had begun, accompanied by a booming ground-bass from Elijah New, the parish-clerk, who had thoughtfully brought with him his favourite musical instrument, the serpent. Dancing was instantaneous, Mrs. Fennel privately enjoining the players on no account to let the dance exceed the length of a quarter of an hour.

But Elijah and the boy, in the excitement of their position, quite forgot the injunction. Moreover, Oliver Giles, a man of seventeen, one of the dancers, who was enamoured of his partner, a fair girl of thirty-three rolling years, had recklessly handed a new crown-piece to the musicians, as a bribe to keep going as long as they had muscle and wind. Mrs. Fennel, seeing the steam begin to generate on the countenances of her guests, crossed over and touched the fiddler's elbow and put her hand on the serpent's mouth. But they took no notice, and fearing she might lose her character of genial hostess if she were to interfere too markedly, she retired and sat down helpless. And so the dance whizzed on with cumulative fury, the performers moving in their planet-like courses, direct and retrograde, from apogee to perigee, till the hand of the well-kicked clock at the bottom of the room had travelled over the circumference of an hour.

¶

WHILE these cheerful events were in course of enactment within Fennel's pastoral dwelling, an incident having considerable bearing on the party had occurred in the gloomy night without. Mrs. Fennel's concern about the growing fierceness of the dance corresponded in point of time with the ascent of a human figure to the solitary hill of Higher Crowstairs from the direction of the distant town. This personage strode on through the rain without a pause, following the little-worn path which, further on in its course, skirted the shepherd's cottage.

It was nearly the time of full moon, and on this account, though the sky was lined with a uniform sheet of dripping cloud, ordinary objects out of doors were readily visible. The sad wan light revealed the lonely pedestrian to be a man of supple frame; his gait suggested that he had somewhat passed the period of perfect and instinctive agility, though not so far as to be otherwise than rapid of motion when occasion required. At a rough guess, he might have been about forty years of age. He appeared tall, but a recruiting sergeant, or other person accustomed to the judging of men's heights by the eye, would have discerned that this was chiefly owing to his gauntness, and that he was not more than five-fee-eight or nine.

Notwithstanding the regularity of his tread, there was caution in it, as in that of one who mentally feels his way; and despite the fact that it was not a black coat nor a dark garment of any sort that he wore, there was something about him which suggested that he naturally belonged to the black-coated tribes of men. His clothes were of fustian, and his boots hobnailed, yet in his progress he showed not the mud-accustomed bearing of hobnailed and fustianed peasantry.

By the time that he had arrived abreast of the shepherd's premises the rain came down, or rather came along, with yet more determined violence. The outskirts of the little settlement partially broke the force of wind and rain, and this induced him to stand still. The most salient of the shepherd's domestic erections was an empty sty at the forward corner of his hedgeless garden, for in these latitudes the principle of masking the homelier features of your establishment by a conventional frontage was unknown. The traveller's eye was attracted to this small building by the pallid shine of the wet slates that covered it. He turned aside, and, finding it empty, stood under the pent-roof for shelter.

While he stood, the boom of the serpent within the adjacent house, and the lesser strains of the fiddler, reached the spot as an accompaniment to the surging hiss of the flying rain on the sod, its louder beating on the cabbage-leaves of the garden, on the eight or ten beehives just discernible by the path, and its dripping from the eaves into a row of buckets and pans that had been placed under the walls of the cottage. For at Higher Crowstairs, as at all such elevated domiciles, the grand difficulty of house-keeping was an insufficiency of water; and a casual rainfall was utilised by turning out, as catchers, every utensil that the house contained. Some queer stories might be told of the contrivances for economy in suds and dish-waters that are absolutely necessitated in upland habitations during the droughts of summer. But at this season there were no such exigencies; a mere acceptance of what the skies bestowed was sufficient for an abundant store.

At last the notes of the serpent ceased and the house was silent. This cessation of activity aroused the solitary pedestrian from the reverie into which he had lapsed and, emerging from the shed, with an apparently new intention, he walked up the path to the house-door. Arrived here, his first act was to kneel down on a large stone beside the row of vessels, and to drink a copious draught from one of them. Having quenched his thirst he rose and lifted his hand to knock, but paused with his eye upon the panel. Since the dark surface of the wood revealed absolutely nothing, it was evident that he must be mentally looking through the door, as if he wished to measure thereby all the possibilities that a house of this sort might include, and how they might bear upon the question of his entry.

In his indecision he turned and surveyed the scene around. Not a soul was anywhere visible. The garden-path stretched downward from his feet, gleaming like the track of a snail; the roof of the little well (mostly dry), the well-cover, the top rail of the garden-gate, were varnished with the same dull liquid glaze; while, far away in the vale, a faint whiteness of more than usual extent showed that the rivers were high in the meads. Beyond all this winked a few bleared lamplights through the beating drops—lights that denoted the situation of the county-town from which he had appeared to come. The absence of all notes of life in that direction seemed to clinch his intentions, and he knocked at the door.

Within, a desultory chat had taken the place of movement and musical sound. The hedge-carpenter was suggesting a song to the company, which nobody just then was inclined to undertake, so that the knock afforded a not unwelcome diversion.

"Walk in!" said the shepherd promptly.

The latch clicked upward, and out of the night our pedestrian appeared upon the door-mat. The shepherd arose, snuffed

two of the nearest candles, and turned to look at him.

Their light disclosed that the stranger was dark in complexion and not unprepossessing as to feature. His hat, which for a moment he did not remove, hung low over his eyes, without concealing that they were large, open, and determined, moving with a flash rather than a glance round the room. He seemed pleased with his survey and, baring his shaggy head, said, in a rich, deep voice, "The rain is so heavy, friends, that I ask leave to come in and rest awhile."

"To be sure, stranger," said the shepherd. "And faith, you've been lucky in choosing your time, for we are having a bit of a fling for a glad cause—though, to be sure, a man could hardly wish that glad cause to happen more than once a year."

"Nor less," spoke up a woman. "For 'tis best to get your family over and done with, as soon as you can, so as to be all the earlier out of the fag o't."

"And what may be this glad cause?" asked the stranger.

"A birth and christening," said the shepherd.

The stranger hoped his host might not be made unhappy either by too many or too few of such episodes, and being invited by a gesture to a pull at the mug, he readily acquiesced. His manner, which, before entering, had been so dubious, was now altogether that of a careless and candid man.

"Late to be traipsing athwart this coomb—hey?" said the engaged man of fifty.

"Late it is, master, as you say—I'll take a seat in the chimney-corner, if you have nothing to urge against it, ma'am; for I am a little moist on the side that was next the rain."

Mrs. Shepherd Fennel assented, and made room for the self-invited comer, who, having got completely inside the chimney-corner, stretched out his legs and his arms with the expansiveness of a person quite at home.

"Yes, I am rather cracked in the vamp," he said freely, seeing that the eyes of the shepherd's wife fell upon his boots, "and I am not well fitted either. I have had some rough times lately, and have been forced to pick up what I can get in the way of wearing, but I must find a suit better fit for working-days when I reach home."

"One of hereabouts?" she inquired.

"Not quite that—further up the country."

"I thought so. And so be I; and by your tongue you come from my neighbourhood."

"But you would hardly have heard of me," he said quickly. "My time would be long before yours, ma'am, you see."

This testimony to the youthfulness of his hostess had the effect of stopping her cross-examination.

"There is only one thing more wanted to make me happy," continued the newcomer. "And that is a little baccy, which I am sorry to say I am out of."

"I'll fill your pipe," said the shepherd. "I must ask you to lend me a pipe likewise."

"A smoker, and no pipe about 'ee?"

"I have dropped it somewhere on the road."

The shepherd filled and handed him a new clay pipe, saying, as he did so, "Hand me your baccy-box—I'll fill that too, now I am about it."

The man went through the movement of searching his pockets.

"Lost that too?" said his entertainer, with some surprise.

"I am afraid so," said the man with some confusion. "Give it to me in a screw of paper." Lighting his pipe at the candle with a suction that drew the whole flame into the bowl, he resettled himself in the corner and bent his looks upon the faint steam from his damp legs, as if he wished to say no more.

¶

MEANWHILE the general body of guests had been taking little notice of this visitor by reason of an absorbing discussion in which they were engaged with the band about a tune for the next dance. The matter being settled, they were about to stand up when an interruption came in the shape of another knock at the door.

At sound of the same the man in the chimney-corner took up the poker and began stirring the brands as if doing it thoroughly were the one aim of his existence; and a second time the shepherd said, "Walk in!" In a moment another man stood upon the straw-woven door-mat. He, too, was a stranger.

This individual was one of a type radically different from the first. There was more of the commonplace in his manner, and a certain jovial cosmopolitanism sat upon his

features. He was several years older than the first arrival, his hair being slightly frosted, his eyebrows bristly, and his whiskers cut back from his cheeks. His face was rather full and flabby, and yet it was not altogether a face without power. A few grog-blossoms marked the neighbourhood of his nose. He flung back his long drab greatcoat, revealing that beneath it he wore a suit of cinder-grey shade throughout, large heavy seals, of some metal or other that would take a polish, dangling from his fob as his only personal ornament. Shaking the water-drops from his low-crowned glazed hat, he said, "I must ask for a few minutes' shelter, comrades, or I shall be wetted to my skin before I get to Casterbridge."

"Make yourself at home, master," said the shepherd, perhaps a trifle less heartily than on the first occasion. Not that Fennel had the least tinge of niggardliness in his composition; but the room was far from large, spare chairs were not numerous, and damp companions were not altogether desirable at close quarters for the women and girls in their bright-coloured gowns.

However, the second comer, after taking off his greatcoat, and hanging his hat on a nail in one of the ceiling-beams as if he had been specially invited to put it there, advanced and sat down at the table. This had been pushed so closely into the chimney-corner, to give all available room to the dancers, that its inner edge grazed the elbow of the man who had ensconced himself by the fire; and thus the two strangers were brought into close companionship. They nodded to each other by way of breaking the ice of unacquaintance, and the first stranger handed his neighbour the family mug—a huge vessel of brown ware, having its upper edge worn away like a threshold by the rub of whole generations of thirsty lips that had gone the way of all flesh, and bearing the following inscription burnt upon its rotund side in yellow letters:—

THERE IS NO FUN
UNTILL i CUM.

The other man, nothing loth, raised the mug to his lips, and drank on, and on, and on—till a curious blueness overspread the countenance of the shepherd's wife, who had regarded with no little surprise the first stranger's free offer to the second of what did not belong to him to dispense.

"I knew it!" said the toper to the shepherd with much satisfaction. "When I walked up your garden before coming in, and saw the hives all of a row, I said to myself, 'Where there's bees there's honey, and where there's honey there's mead.' But mead of such a truly comfortable sort as this I really didn't expect to meet in my older days." He took yet another pull at the mug, till it assumed an ominous elevation.

"Glad you enjoy it!" said the shepherd warmly.

"It is goodish mead," assented Mrs. Fennel, with an absence of enthusiasm which seemed to say that it was possible to buy praise for one's cellar at too heavy a price. "It is trouble enough to make—and really I hardly think we shall make any more. For honey sells well, and we ourselves can make shift with a drop o' small mead and metheglin for common use from the comb-washings."

"O, but you'll never have the heart!" reproachfully cried the stranger in cinder-grey, after taking up the mug a third time and setting it down empty. "I love mead, when 'tis old like this, as I love to go to church o' Sundays, or to relieve the needy any day of the week."

"Ha, ha, ha!" said the man in the chimney-corner, who, in spite of the taciturnity induced by the pipe of tobacco, could not or would not refrain from this slight testimony to his comrade's humour.

Now the old mead of those days, brewed of the purest first-year or maiden honey, four pounds to the gallon—with its due complement of white of eggs, cinnamon, ginger, cloves, mace, rosemary, yeast, and processes of working, bottling, and cellaring—tasted remarkably strong; but it did not taste so strong as it actually was. Hence, presently, the stranger in cinder-grey at the table, moved by its creeping influence, unbuttoned his waistcoat, threw himself back in his chair, spread his legs, and made his presence felt in various ways.

"Well, well, as I say," he resumed, "I am going to Casterbridge, and to Casterbridge I must go. I should have been almost there by this time; but the rain drove me into your dwelling, and I'm not sorry for it."

"You don't live in Casterbridge?" said the shepherd.

"Not as yet; though I shortly mean to move there."

"Going to set up in trade, perhaps?"

"No, no," said the shepherd's wife. "It is easy to see that the gentleman is rich, and don't want to work at anything."

The cinder-grey stranger paused, as if to consider whether he would accept that definition of himself. He presently rejected it by answering, "Rich is not quite the word for me, dame. I do work, and I must work. And even if I only get to Casterbridge by midnight I must begin work there at eight to-morrow morning. Yes, het or wet, blow or snow, famine or sword, my day's work to-morrow must be done."

"Poor man! Then, in spite o' seeming, you be worse off than we?" replied the shepherd's wife.

"'Tis the nature of my trade, men and maidens. 'Tis the nature of my trade more than my poverty . . . But really and truly I must up and off, or I shan't get a lodging in the town." However, the speaker did not move, and directly added, "There's time for one more draught of friendship before I go; and I'd perform it at once if the mug were not dry."

"Here's a mug o' small," said Mrs. Fennel. "Small, we call it, though to be sure 'tis only the first wash o' the combs."

"No," said the stranger disdainfully. "I won't spoil your first kindness by partaking o' your second."

"Certainly not," broke in Fennel. "We don't increase and multiply every day, and I'll fill the mug again." He went away to the dark place under the stairs where the barrel stood. The shepherdess followed him.

"Why should you do this?" she said reproachfully, as soon as they were alone. "He's emptied it once, though it held enough for ten people; and now he's not contented wi' the small, but must needs call for more o' the strong! And a stranger unbeknown to any of us. For my part, I don't like the look o' the man at all."

"But he's in the house, my honey; and 'tis a wet night, and a christening. Daze it, what's a cup of mead more or less? There'll be plenty more next bee-burning."

"Very well—this time, then," she answered, looking wistfully at the barrel. "But what is the man's calling, and where is he one of, that he should come in and join us like this?"

"I don't know. I'll ask him again."

The catastrophe of having the mug drained dry at one pull by the stranger in cinder-grey was effectually guarded against this time by Mrs. Fennel. She poured out his allowance in a small cup, keeping the large one at a discreet distance from him. When he had tossed off his portion the shepherd renewed his inquiry about the stranger's occupation.

The latter did not immediately reply, and the man in the chimney-corner, with sudden demonstrativeness, said, "Anybody may know my trade—I'm a wheelwright."

"A very good trade for these parts," said the shepherd.

"And anybody may know mine—if they've the sense to find it out," said the stranger in cinder-grey.

"You may generally tell what a man is by his claws," observed the hedge-carpenter, looking at his own hands. "My fingers be as full of thorns as an old pin-cushion is of pins."

The hands of the man in the chimney-corner instinctively sought the shade, and he gazed into the fire as he resumed his pipe. The man at the table took up the hedge-carpenter's remark, and added smartly, "True; but the oddity of my trade is that, instead of setting a mark upon me, it sets a mark upon my customers."

No observation being offered by anybody in elucidation of this enigma, the shepherd's wife once more called for a song. The same obstacles presented themselves as at the former time—one had no voice, another had forgotten the first verse. The stranger at the table, whose soul had now risen to a good working temperature, relieved the difficulty by exclaiming that, to start the company, he would sing himself. Thrusting one thumb into the arm-hole of his waistcoat, he waved the other hand in the air, and, with an extemporising gaze at the shining sheep-crooks above the mantelpiece, began:—

O my trade it is the rarest one,
Simple shepherds all—
My trade is a sight to see;
For my customers I tie, and take them up on high,
And waft 'em to a far countree!

The room was silent when he had finished the verse—with one exception, that of the man in the chimney-corner, who, at the singer's word, "Chorus!" joined him in a deep bass voice of musical relish—

And waft 'em to a far countree!

Oliver Giles, John Pitcher, the dairyman, the parish-clerk, the engaged man of fifty,

the row of young women against the wall, seemed lost in thought not of the gayest kind. The shepherd looked meditatively on the ground, the shepherdess gazed keenly at the singer, and with some suspicion; she was doubting whether this stranger were merely singing an old song from recollection, or was composing one there and then for the occasion. All were as perplexed at the obscure revelation as the guests at Belshazzar's Feast, except the man in the chimney-corner, who quietly said, "Second verse, stranger," and smoked on.

The singer thoroughly moistened himself from his lips inwards, and went on with the next stanza as requested :—

My tools are but common ones,
Simple shepherds all—
My tools are no sight to see :
A little hempen string, and a post whereon to swing,
Are implements enough for me !

Shepherd Fennel glanced round. There was no longer any doubt that the stranger was answering his question rhythmically. The guests one and all started back with suppressed exclamations. The young woman engaged to the man of fifty fainted half-way, and would have proceeded, but finding him wanting in alacrity for catching her she sat down trembling.

"O, he's the ——!" whispered the people in the background, mentioning the name of an ominous public officer. "He's come to do it! 'Tis to be at Casterbridge jail to-morrow—the man for sheep-stealing—the poor clock-maker we heard of, who used to live away at Shottsford and had no work to do—Timothy Summers, whose family were a-starving, and so he went out of Shottsford by the high-road, and took a sheep in open daylight, defying the farmer and the farmer's wife and the farmer's lad, and every man jack among 'em. He" (and they nodded towards the stranger of the deadly trade) "is come from up the country to do it because there's not enough to do in his own county-town, and he's got the place here now our own county man's dead; he's going to live in the same cottage under the prison wall."

The stranger in cinder-grey took no notice of this whispered string of observations, but again wetted his lips. Seeing that his friend in the chimney-corner was the only one who reciprocated his joviality in any way, he held out his cup towards that appreciative comrade, who also held out his own. They clinked together, the eyes of the rest of the room hanging upon the singer's actions. He parted his lips for the third verse; but at that moment another knock was audible upon the door. This time the knock was faint and hesitating.

The company seemed scared; the shepherd looked with consternation towards the entrance, and it was with some effort that he resisted his alarmed wife's deprecatory glance, and uttered for the third time the welcoming words, "Walk in!"

The door was gently opened, and another man stood upon the mat. He, like those who had preceded him, was a stranger. This time it was a short, small personage, of fair complexion, and dressed in a decent suit of dark clothes.

"Can you tell me the way to ——?" he began: when, gazing round the room to observe the nature of the company amongst whom he had fallen, his eyes lighted on the stranger in cinder-grey. It was just at the instant when the latter, who had thrown his mind into his song with such a will that he scarcely heeded the interruption, silenced all whispers and inquiries by bursting into his third verse :—

To-morrow is my working day,
Simple shepherds all—
To-morrow is a working day for me :
For the farmer's sheep is slain, and the lad who did it ta'en,
And on his soul may God ha' merc-y !

The stranger in the chimney-corner, waving cups with the singer so heartily that his mead splashed over on the hearth, repeated in his bass voice as before :—

And on his soul may God ha' merc-y !

¶

ALL this time the third stranger had been standing in the doorway. Finding now that he did not come forward or go on speaking, the guests particularly regarded him. They noticed to their surprise that he stood before them the picture of abject terror—his knees trembling, his hand shaking so violently that the doorlatch by which he supported himself rattled audibly: his white lips were parted, and his eyes fixed on the merry officer of justice in the middle of the room. A moment more and he had turned, closed the door, and fled.

"What a man can it be?" said the shepherd.

The rest, between the awfulness of their late discovery and the odd conduct of this third visitor, looked as if they knew not what to think, and said nothing. Instinctively they withdrew further and further from the grim gentleman in their midst, whom some of them seemed to take for the Prince of Darkness himself, till they formed a remote circle, an empty space of floor being left between them and him—

. . . *circulus, cujus centrum diabolus.*

The room was so silent—though there were more than twenty people in it—that nothing could be heard but the patter of the rain against the window-shutters, accompanied by the occasional hiss of a stray drop that fell down the chimney into the fire, and the steady puffing of the man in the corner, who had now resumed his pipe of long clay.

The stillness was unexpectedly broken. The distant sound of a gun reverberated through the air—apparently from the direction of the county-town.

"Be jiggered!" cried the stranger who had sung the song, jumping up.

"What does that mean?" asked several.

"A prisoner escaped from the jail—that's what it means."

All listened. The sound was repeated, and none of them spoke but the man in the chimney-corner, who said quietly, "I've often been told in this country they fire a gun at such times; but I never heard it till now."

"I wonder if it is *my* man?" murmured the personage in cinder-grey.

"Surely it is!" said the shepherd involuntarily. "And surely we've zeed him! That little man who looked in at the door by now, and quivered like a leaf when he zeed ye and heard your song!"

"His teeth chattered, and the breath went out of his body," said the dairyman.

"And his heart seemed to sink within him like a stone," said Oliver Giles.

"And he bolted as if he'd been shot at," said the hedge-carpenter.

"True—his teeth chattered, and his heart seemed to sink; and he bolted as if he'd been shot at," slowly summed up the man in the chimney-corner.

"I didn't notice it," remarked the hangman.

"We were all a-wondering what made him run off in such a fright," faltered one of the women against the wall, "and now 'tis explained!"

The firing of the alarm-gun went on at intervals, low and sullenly, and their suspicions became a certainty. The sinister gentleman in cinder-grey roused himself. "Is there a constable here?" he asked, in thick tones. "If so, let him step forward."

The engaged man of fifty stepped quavering out from the wall, his betrothed beginning to sob on the back of the chair.

"You are a sworn constable?"

"I be, sir."

"Then pursue the criminal at once, with assistance, and bring him back here. He can't have gone far."

"I will, sir, I will—when I've got my staff. I'll go home and get it, and come sharp here, and start in a body."

"Staff!—never mind your staff; the man'll be gone!"

"But I can't do nothing without my staff—can I, William, and John, and Charles Jake? No; for there's the king's royal crown a painted on en in yaller and gold, and the lion and the unicorn, so as when I raise en up and hit my prisoner, 'tis made a lawful blow thereby. I wouldn't 'tempt to take up a man without my staff—no, not I. If I hadn't the law to gie me courage, why, instead o' my taking up him he might take up me!"

"Now, I'm a king's man myself, and can give you authority enough for this," said the formidable officer in grey. "Now then, all of ye, be ready. Have ye any lanterns?"

"Yes—have ye any lanterns?—I demand it!" said the constable.

"And the rest of you able-bodied——"

"Able-bodied men—yes—the rest of ye!" said the constable.

"Have you some good stout staves and pitchforks——"

"Staves and pitchforks—in the name o' the law! And take 'em in yer hands and go in quest, and do as we in authority tell ye!"

Thus aroused, the men prepared to give chase. The evidence was, indeed, though circumstantial, so convincing, that but little argument was needed to show the shepherd's guests that after what they had seen it would look very much like connivance if they did not instantly pursue the unhappy third stranger, who could not as yet have gone more than a few hundred yards over such uneven country.

A shepherd is always well provided with lanterns; and, lighting these hastily, and with hurdle-staves in their hands, they

poured out of the door, taking a direction along the crest of the hill, away from the town, the rain having fortunately a little abated.

Disturbed by the noise, or possibly by unpleasant dreams of her baptism, the child who had been christened began to cry heart-brokenly in the room overhead. These notes of grief came down through the chinks of the floor to the ears of the women below, who jumped up one by one, and seemed glad of the excuse to ascend and comfort the baby, for the incidents of the last half-hour greatly oppressed them. Thus in the space of two or three minutes the room on the ground-floor was deserted quite.

But it was not for long. Hardly had the sound of footsteps died away when a man returned round the corner of the house from the direction the pursuers had taken. Peeping in at the door, and seeing nobody there, he entered leisurely. It was the stranger of the chimney-corner, who had gone out with the rest. The motive of his return was shown by his helping himself to a cut piece of skimmer-cake that lay on a ledge beside where he had sat, and which he had apparently forgotten to take with him. He also poured out half a cup more mead from the quantity that remained, ravenously eating and drinking these as he stood. He had not finished when another figure came in just as quietly—his friend in cinder-grey.

"O—you here?" said the latter, smiling. "I thought you had gone to help in the capture." And this speaker also revealed the object of his return by looking solicitously round for the fascinating mug of old mead.

"And I thought you had gone," said the other, continuing his skimmer-cake with some effort.

"Well, on second thoughts, I felt there were enough without me," said the first confidentially, "and such a night as it is, too. Besides, 'tis the business o' the Government to take care of its criminals—not mine."

"True; so it is. And I felt as you did, that there were enough without me."

"I don't want to break my limbs running over the humps and hollows of this wild country."

"Nor I neither, between you and me."

"These shepherd-people are used to it—simple-minded souls, you know, stirred up to anything in a moment. They'll have him ready for me before the morning, and no trouble to me at all."

"They'll have him, and we shall have saved ourselves all labour in the matter."

"True, true. Well, my way is to Casterbridge; and 'tis as much as my legs will do to take me that far. Going the same way?"

"No, I am sorry to say! I have to get home over there" (he nodded indefinitely to the right), "and I feel as you do, that it is quite enough for my legs to do before bedtime."

The other had by this time finished the mead in the mug, after which, shaking hands heartily at the door, and wishing each other well, they went their several ways.

¶

IN the meantime the company of pursuers had reached the end of the hog's-back elevation which dominated this part of the down. They had decided on no particular plan of action; and, finding that the man of the baleful trade was no longer in their company, they seemed quite unable to form any such plan now. They descended in all directions down the hill, and straightway several of the party fell into the snare set by Nature for all misguided midnight ramblers over this part of the cretaceous formation. The "lanchets," or flint slopes, which belted the escarpment at intervals of a dozen yards, took the less cautious ones unawares, and losing their footing on the rubbly steep they slid sharply downwards, the lanterns rolling from their hands to the bottom, and there lying on their sides till the horn was scorched through.

When they had again gathered themselves together, the shepherd, as the man who knew the country best, took the lead, and guided them round these treacherous inclines. The lanterns, which seemed rather to dazzle their eyes and warn the fugitive than to assist them in the exploration, were extinguished, due silence was observed; and in this more rational order they plunged into the vale. It was a grassy, briery, moist defile, affording some shelter to any person who had sought it; but the party perambulated it in vain, and ascended on the other side. Here they wandered apart, and after an interval closed together again to report progress. At the second time of closing in they found themselves near a lonely ash, the single tree on this part of the coomb, probably sown there by a passing bird some fifty years before. And here,

standing a little to one side of the trunk, as motionless as the trunk itself, appeared the man they were in quest of, his outline being well defined against the sky beyond. The band noiselessly drew up and faced him.

"Your money or your life!" said the constable sternly to the still figure.

"No, no," whispered John Pitcher. "'Tisn't our side ought to say that. That's the doctrine of vagabonds like him, and we be on the side of the law."

"Well, well," replied the constable impatiently; "I must say something, mustn't I? and if you had all the weight o' this undertaking upon your mind, perhaps you'd say the wrong thing too!—Prisoner at the bar, surrender, in the name of the Father—the Crown, I mane!"

The man under the tree seemed now to notice them for the first time and, giving them no opportunity whatever for exhibiting their courage, he strolled slowly towards them. He was, indeed, the little man, the third stranger; but his trepidation had in a great measure gone.

"Well, travellers," he said, "did I hear ye speak to me?"

"You did: you've got to come and be our prisoner at once!" said the constable. "We arrest 'ee on the charge of not biding in Casterbridge jail in a decent proper manner to be hung to-morrow morning. Neighbours, do your duty, and seize the culpet!"

On hearing the charge, the man seemed enlightened and, saying not another word, resigned himself with preternatural civility to the search-party, who, with their staves in their hands, surrounded him on all sides, and marched him back towards the shepherd's cottage.

It was eleven o'clock by the time they arrived. The light shining from the open door, a sound of men's voices within, proclaimed to them as they approached the house that some new events had arisen in their absence. On entering they discovered the shepherd's living room to be invaded by two officers from Casterbridge jail, and a well-known magistrate who lived at the nearest country-seat, intelligence of the escape having become generally circulated.

"Gentlemen," said the constable, "I have brought back your man—not without risk and danger; but every one must do his duty! He is inside this circle of able-bodied persons, who have lent me useful aid, considering their ignorance of Crown work. Men, bring forward your prisoner!" And the third stranger was led to the light.

"Who is this?" said one of the officials.

"The man," said the constable.

"Certainly not," said the turnkey; and the first corroborated his statement.

"But how can it be otherwise?" asked the constable. "Or why was he so terrified at sight o' the singing instrument of the law who sat there?" Here he related the strange behaviour of the third stranger on entering the house during the hangman's song.

"Can't understand it," said the officer coolly. "All I know is that it is not the condemned man. He's quite a different character from this one; a gauntish fellow, with dark hair and eyes, rather good-looking, and with a musical bass voice that if you heard it once you'd never mistake as long as you lived."

"Why, souls—'twas the man in the chimney-corner!"

"Hey—what?" said the magistrate, coming forward after inquiring particulars from the shepherd in the background. "Haven't you got the man after all?"

"Well, sir," said the constable, "he's the man we were in search of, that's true; and yet he's not the man we were in search of. For the man we were in search of was not the man we wanted, sir, if you understand my every-day way; for 'twas the man in the chimney-corner!"

"A pretty kettle of fish altogether!" said the magistrate. "You had better start for the other man at once."

The prisoner now spoke for the first time. The mention of the man in the chimney-corner seemed to have moved him as nothing else could do. "Sir," he said, stepping forward to the magistrate, "take no more trouble about me. The time is come when I may as well speak. I have done nothing; my crime is that the condemned man is my brother. Early this afternoon I left home at Shottsford to tramp it all the way to Casterbridge jail to bid him farewell. I was benighted, and called here to rest and ask the way. When I opened the door I saw before me the very man, my brother, that I thought to see in the condemned cell at Casterbridge. He was in this chimney-corner; and jammed close to him, so that he could not have got out if he had tried, was the executioner who'd come to take his life, singing a song about it and

not knowing that it was his victim who was close by, joining in to save appearances. My brother looked a glance of agony at me, and I knew he meant, " Don't reveal what you see ; my life depends on it." I was so terror-struck that I could hardly stand, and, not knowing what I did, I turned and hurried away."

The narrator's manner and tone had the stamp of truth, and his story made a great impression on all around. " And do you know where your brother is at the present time ? " asked the magistrate.

" I do not. I have never seen him since I closed this door."

" I can testify to that, for we've been between ye ever since," said the constable. " Where does he think to fly to ?—what is his occupation ? "

" He's a watch-and-clock-maker, sir."

" 'A said 'a was a wheelwright—a wicked rogue," said the constable.

" The wheels of clocks and watches he meant, no doubt," said Shepherd Fennel. "I thought his hands were palish for's trade."

" Well, it appears to me that nothing can be gained by retaining this poor man in custody," said the magistrate ; " your business lies with the other, unquestionably."

And so the little man was released off-hand ; but he looked nothing the less sad on that account, it being beyond the power of magistrate or constable to raze out the written troubles in his brain, for they concerned another whom he regarded with more solicitude than himself. When this was done, and the man had gone his way, the night was found to be so far advanced that it was deemed useless to renew the search before the next morning.

Next day, accordingly, the quest for the clever sheep-stealer became general and keen, to all appearance at least. But the intended punishment was cruelly disproportioned to the transgression, and the sympathy of a great many country-folk in that district was strongly on the side of the fugitive. Moreover, his marvellous coolness and daring in hob-and-nobbing with the hangman, under the unprecedented circumstances of the shepherd's party, won their admiration. So that it may be questioned if all those who ostensibly made themselves so busy in exploring woods and fields and lanes were quite so thorough when it came to the private examination of their own lofts and outhouses. Stories were afloat of a mysterious figure being occasionally seen in some old overgrown trackway or other, remote from turnpike roads ; but when a search was instituted in any of these suspected quarters nobody was found. Thus the days and weeks passed without tidings.

In brief, the bass-voiced man of the chimney-corner was never recaptured. Some said that he went across the sea, others that he did not, but buried himself in the depths of a populous city. At any rate, the gentleman in cinder-grey never did his morning's work at Casterbridge, nor met anywhere at all, for business purposes, the genial comrade with whom he had passed an hour of relaxation in the lonely house on the coomb.

The grass has long been green on the graves of Shepherd Fennel and his frugal wife ; the guests who made up the christening party have mainly followed their entertainers to the tomb ; the baby in whose honour they all had met is a matron in the sere and yellow leaf. But the arrival of the three strangers at the shepherd's that night, and the details connected therewith, is a story as well known as ever in the country about Higher Crowstairs.

Monsieur L'Abbé

Intrigue and a woman's ruse in Old France

By AGNES & EGERTON CASTLE

THERE was no doubt about it, Citoyenne Michelin was a good patriot. She was a more devout worshipper at the shrine of Saint Guillotine than almost anyone in the street. Her red cap drawn over her thick bands of grizzling black hair; a cockade on the immense amplitude of her bosom; coarse blue knitting in her sallow fat hands. You might see her waddling after the tumbrils, or installed at the foot of the scaffold, counting the taking of her stitches or the fall of heads with a like placidity.

If there was a demonstration to be made outside house or prison, her huge contralto led the chant of execration. She was at the head of every procession. There was a rumour—true or untrue, it added vastly to her popularity—that she piloted the mob in their first attack on the Tuileries. It was certain she knew her way about the royal apartments, for her husband had been court hairdresser.

Now it was this circumstance perhaps, which made it so very fortunate for Citoyen Charles Michelin—once the celebrated Monsieur Charles, of the Private Entry—that he should possess a consort so splendidly sanguinary, so incontestably Jacobin.

The citoyenne's counsel was brief and to the point. "Kill them all!"

Citoyen Michelin was a dark-faced, stay-at-home man whose voice was seldom heard. He would corroborate his wife's remarks with a nod. His reticence made him rather suspect, and coupled with the irrefutable fact that he had sold scented poudre à la Maréchale to the court, and that it could not be expected that a man with such a commerce should welcome the rule of Sans-Culottes and cropped heads. A noisy man might have shouted down suspicion, but such silence was held to cover regret.

He was arrested two or three times, but the wife of Michelin had had to be counted with. She roared, and her man was released each time within the twenty-four hours.

The worthy pair had a child; a jovial, plump, black-eyed girl of ten: the Citoyenne boasted to all her gossips that Charlotte, so called after her father, was a true daughter of the Revolution.

"To see her there, playing with her skipping rope, up and down before the shop, none would ever guess that the little one is all the while watching for the tumbrils. And each time one passes, it is a joy! You can hear her jump. Hold—I will tell you. She has made a little game for herself with her skipping-rope. In a trice she has counted how many sit in each cart, and then there's a skip for every head, and a double turn if it's one of the old *patrons* or *patronnes*. Charles," the spouse Michelin might ruminatively proceed, "is anxious I should bring her with me to the Place de la Révolution," here the Citoyenne winked one eye, and jerked her knitting needles across her throat. "But, *baste!* I say she is but a child still. 'Twill be time enough when she is twelve, if the good days last so long."

She would now and again quote her husband after this fashion, in such a natural kind of way that her lips carried conviction.

The shop—it was a small one, at the angle of the Rue St. Honoré and the Rue St. Roch—was considerably frequented, even in these revolution days. Certain good patriots, like the late Comte de Mirabeau, still used poudre à la Maréchale, and dressed with elegance. Certain wives and fair friends of new-risen ministers still thought a woman's beauty might be enhanced by a sweet scent, a knot of flowers, a well-placed curl. There were heads, teeming with new theories, who yet needed wigs, and sweethearts of fierce Jacobins found the times trying to their complexions and sought a finger of that special rouge of which Charles Michelin had the secret, to hide the unbecoming pallor produced by their woman's fears.

But, it was respectfully whispered, company foregathered at the hairdressers for

other wares than those of the toilet. After his last triumphant acquittal, district feeling veered from darkest doubt to an awed admiration of the hairdresser. A notion spread that in those upper rooms, inhabited by mysterious lodgers who went in and out the back garden way in the dark of night, who received equally mysterious visitors, some of the most audacious measures connected with the people's welfare were first discussed.

It was rumoured that it would not be wholesome to put a name to the cadaverous countenance that had been seen once or twice at the window of the upper floor.

Spouse Michelin had been heard to remark in a moment of expansion, that a hairdresser was as good as a cabinet maker any day, and one end of the Rue St. Roch as good as the other.

A late September sunset between two showers, a yellow rift in the sky between two clouds, reflected in the long shiny street. In the *terrains vagues*, the waste lands at the back of the garden of the hairdresser's shop, there were pools, shuddering to the sky with every capricious sigh of the wind. In front of the shop fat Charlotte, her thick black plait of hair tied with a red ribbon, was caracoling up and down the street, swinging her skipping-rope. Now and again she would turn an innocent grin of enjoyment upon her mother who sat just within the window to catch the last glimmer of light for her knitting. Saturnine Michelin, the hairdresser, somewhere in the back shop, was tinkering away at a small lantern, the slide of which with long brown fingers he was manipulating by the light of a tallow candle. Further back again in the little kitchen toothless old Marie, the *bonne*, was making a savoury smell over the charcoal stove. A more comfortable, innocent family of patriots it would be impossible to find in all Paris.

Presently the Citoyenne laid down her knitting and rose from her seat by the window.

"There is about to come up another monstrous shower, my Charlotte," she said. "The little one reports all clear. I will call her in; we can drop the shutters, and you can go about your business. When I think of Monsieur le Comte out there since nine o'clock this morning it gives me cold to the heart."

The hairdresser snapped the little shutter of his lantern backwards and forwards two or three times, then got up, straightened himself and remarked sententiously:

"One must suffer something nowadays to be alive at all."

"Ah, that is true for you, my man. God knows what I went through at the beginning out there in the Place. But now, Heaven forgive me, it scarcely makes more to me to see the heads hop, than if they were pulling beans. One habituates oneself!" She shrugged her immense shoulders. "And the little one, does she tire herself with that skipping-rope? Ah, that is a good child, Charlotte!"

"She is your daughter," said the man, without an inflection of expression or voice to mark the fact that he was paying a compliment. "In that all is said."

A sweep of wind and rain came dashing against the angle of the shop, beating loudly on the panes.

Michelin glanced at the clock. "It is full early," he said, "but the weather is favourable. Call in the little one and drop the shutters. I go about my business."

"The Virgin guard thee!" cried Madame Michelin piously.

"Come in, Charlotte my daughter, and help me with the *volets*."

Michelin lit an end of candle, closed his lantern, caught up a grey cloak and a slouch hat from under the counter and retiring into the back shop, briskly clothed himself with these articles. He nodded to old Marie as he went through the kitchen and she nodded back, her small nutcracker face almost divided by the width of her toothless smile. Then, carefully closing the door behind him, he went out into the scrubby patch dignified by the name of garden, head bent against the full blast and driving rain.

The Citoyenne Michelin stepped forth into the street and with an activity surprising in one of her avoirdupois, began to pull the heavy shutters, while, her round, good-humoured face shining with wet, Charlotte drew the bolts from within. The good woman heaved a deep sigh as she fastened the door of the shop, listening with a half absent smile to her daughter's voluble whispering.

"For to-night, little mother, I think it's all as safe as safe can be. *Le vieux d'en face, tu sais*, the old curmudgeon who is always spying; he's got finely drenched, *va*, and I heard him cough. He will put his nose out no more, you can take my word for it. And the Brigadier, that one, he has no longer the least suspicion. 'How many

heads to-day, little cabbage?' said he, as he saw me skipping. 'Sixty-five,' said I. 'And two for the old *chanoinesse*, I counted well.'"

Here the eager gaiety in her countenance was succeeded by a lamentable expression.

"The good old *chanoinesse*, who used to collect for the poor at the church, you remember. They got her. She was in the second tumbril, saying her rosary. Did you see her go up?"

"May God have her soul," said the *tricoteuse*, and added rather regretfully, "I must have missed her in the shower. It gives me, all the same, a heart wrench. Run up to the Marquise now, little one, and see if she wants anything. Ask her to excuse us if supper is a little late, as father expects a new guest."

¶

CHARLOTTE started cantering up the wooden stairs like a willing pony, and Madame Michelin lit a lamp, and passed into the parlour behind the shop.

In these times of terror people were glad to shut up their shops at fall of day, and it was a recognized thing, moreover, that ardent patriots must employ the evenings at one or other of the celebrated clubs where the affairs of the nation were discussed, and the enemies of the people denounced.

The parlour was a cosy little room enough, giving on the garden. It had a flock paper of emerald hue, a round cherry-wood table, highly polished, a painted floor, and a couple of capacious presses. A gilt clock stood on the grey slate chimney-piece, and on one of the ormolu candelabra to match, was rakishly hung a red cap.

Madame Michelin, setting the lamp beside it, began very methodically to lay the table, taking linen from one cupboard and glasses and cutlery from another. When she had set places for three, she put the lamp in the middle of the white table-cloth and stepping heavily, but softly, in her list slippers, waddled into the kitchen.

"Take good heed over the soup to-night, Marie," said her mistress. "See that it has a fine savour and is truly nourishing, for the friend whom Monsieur Michelin will bring in will want sustenance."

"*Oui-da*," retorted old Marie, dragging the corners of her inhumanly large mouth downwards, "it's easy talking, but here's Madame la Marquise sends a message by the little one that if there is another onion in my *cuisine* to-night she will die of it."

"The *peste* have her!" Madame Michelin was good-humoured but peremptory. "She can have a *lait de poule* then, my old one, for onions are precious to a tired man. Ah! Ah! Madame la Marquise with her vapours! Of all my poor ladies she is the one who has given me the most trouble, but there, what a little head to save! Unhappy young lady, it is dull for her, shut up in my back bedroom, day in, day out, with never a breath of air, except when it is too dark for anyone to see that face of hers. It is a thousand pities she should be so exquisite. It is the first of them all I have not been able to disguise Ah! *celle-là*. I shall begin to breathe the hour we smuggle her safe off!"

"And I!" quoth the cook, lifting the lid from a simmering brown pot, and thereby allowing a most appetising whiff to mingle with the aroma of onion soup. "Madame may talk of an egg flip, but who would have the heart to see the poor young lady supping off such stuff——Yet Lord knows if she will as much as look at my partridges! They weren't so very young, Madame Michelin, so I am braising them with cabbage and a garlic sausage——"

"Chut!" The hairdresser's wife gave a fat chuckle. "Never mention the word. As for the soup, we'll tell her it's a barley cream, and the partridge, she will eat it as if you had stuffed it with carnations, so long as she doesn't know! Ah! one must understand how to deal with these delicacies, my good Marie."

She rolled into the little larder, came out with a yard of bread, and disappeared into the parlour.

Marie was rather hard of hearing, or she might have become aware of sundry stealthy sounds in the garden without. From within the parlour Madame Michelin heard them, paused in her work of cutting generous hunches off the long roll; and laying down the knife, trotted rather than walked towards the back entrance.

The door rolled noiselessly back—all the hinges of all the doors belonging to the shop which formed the angle of the Rue St. Honoré and the Rue St. Roch were kept singularly well oiled—and Monsieur Michelin, followed by a tall figure, entered.

The hairdresser was sufficiently wet,

but his companion might have been picked out of the Seine after a week's immersion. To say that he was saturated was inadequately to express his abject wetness. Muddy too, slime-covered, horribly, dankly, he dripped from every feature.

Madame uttered a stifled ejaculation, then, gathering her skirts about her, beckoned with one large, yellow forefinger. As the newcomer stared vaguely, his teeth chattering, Michelin himself caught him by the elbow and propelled him in the direction indicated by his spouse.

They found themselves in a large brick room, half laundry, half bakery, lit only by the little gleam of the hairdresser's dark lantern.

"Bring the lamp, wife," ordered Michelin in a low voice. "Some towels and hot water, while I prepare the disguise of Monsieur le Comte."

But even as she turned to obey, he arrested her.

"One word. A thousand pardons, Seigneur, for keeping you a moment longer in this humidity, but it concerns Monsieur's safety. We have upstairs a lady, a scatter-brain, a weather-cock. To trust her with the secret of Monseigneur's identity would be to invite misfortune. It is true we keep her close, but one never knows. The birds of the air carry grain. Idle speech flies far. Monsieur le Comte, you must consent to pass, for the time, long or short, you may have to spend in this house, as the Abbé Adam Coedic, non-juring priest from Brittany, on an important secret mission; and that one up there will leave you alone. She will respect the Church."

"In the name of Heaven, my good Charles," exclaimed the refugee, irritably, "so you let me get dry again, I will play the Pope himself."

The hairdresser made a sign to his consort, who instantly vanished, while he himself stooped to draw from some hidden recess of the oven a rough bundle of clothes.

"Naturally," he said, as he began to unroll it on the vast wooden table which was the only other furniture of the room, "Monsieur l'Abbé must be once more disguised for the public. Here are garments which would suit some petty employé. Monsieur l'Abbé is a schoolmaster from Nantes, officially, should any curious nose come sniffing about. Citoyen Adam—the same Christian name will serve, not to burden Monsieur's memory. A high neckerchief; the Citoyen's throat is delicate. Blue spectacles; his sight is enfeebled through much study."

Seeing his companion pause, frowning, in the act of dragging off the unspeakably clinging garments from his back, Michelin added, lowering his voice:

"I cannot consent to receive Monsieur le Comte under my roof unless he subscribes to such measures as are necessary for his preservation and that of my family!"

A smile of remarkable sweetness transfigured for a moment Monsieur le Comte's tired face.

"My good Michelin, my hand on it."

The hairdresser bent low over the grimy fingers.

Madame Michelin, waddling in with her burden, the door was bolted and the pair set to work once again with the curious dumb activity expressive of the extreme danger of the situation.

When his toilet was completed and the handsome face and fine figure, for a moment revealed, became extinguished again under the ill-fitting, country-cut suit of small clothes, coarse knitted stockings, the windings of a washed-out yellow silk muffler and the obliterating blue goggles, Michelin stepped back and whispered in an undertone of triumph:

"Now is Monsieur le Comte de Valroche so transformed that I defy even the bright eyes of Madame la Marquise to recognize him."

"Madame la Marquise!" ejaculated the victim, with a sudden startled look.

"The Marquise Adhémar de la Tremblaye," explained Madame Michelin, as she swept the Comte's discarded vesture towards the coal hole with vigorous strokes of her broom.

"Divine Goodness!" cried the disguised, clutching at the table for support. There was mixed rapture and agony in his voice.

II

IN spite of her fastidious protestations, Athenaïs de la Tremblaye partook of onion soup and partridge stewed with cabbage, without, as Citoyenne Michelin expressed it, "as much as wagging an eyebrow."

The fact was, the arrival of a fellow-refugee into the dullness of her imprisoned life was an event, though it were that least

interesting of all personalities to a frivolous little woman: a country priest.

The hairdresser had not been wrong in testifying of her respect for the Church. She could not hope to amuse herself with the poor bespectacled Abbé, but one might learn something, find out what friends were doing, how it fared with hopes and plans.

The introductions were ceremonious, as performed by Michelin. A nervous man, the Abbé Coedic, he stammered and changed colour, his hand shook like a leaf as, sitting down beside her, he lifted a glass of wine to his lips.

The Marquise's old cousin ate with them, an innocent, middle-aged *chanoinesse*, who had lived on other people's bounty all her life, and who had had the misfortune of sharing her patroness' dangers, and now the luck to share her hiding-place. Unlike the Marquise, she thoroughly enjoyed old Marie's cooking, and save for piously crossing herself as the Abbé muttered grace, had very little thought to spare for his company.

Conversation then was carried on between the new guest and her whose aristocratic beauty the hairdresser had deemed too exquisite to disguise with success; but indeed it could hardly be called conversation, since all the Marquise's talking could scarcely extract more than a grunt from the newcomer.

"The man is a savage, or a hermit," thought the exasperated little lady. "Just Heavens, I am after all, a soul! If he is too afraid of his virtue to speak or smile, I'll make him remember his priestly duty."

They had arrived at dessert. Charlotte, running in from the kitchen, had just set on the table a majolica dish of golden pears, and Michelin rising from his own meal, had just refilled the decanter of wine at the cask, and set it by the Abbé's elbow.

The *chanoinesse* concentrated all her lazy energies on the peeling of her portion, the fair Athenaïs edged her chair nearer that of the pretended priest, and began to whisper.

"Monsieur l'Abbé, it is surely Providence who has sent you. I live here in such danger—I bring such danger on the good people who hide me, that I dare not even go out at dark. At least now, Monsieur l'Abbé, I shall be able to find some spiritual comfort. You will let me confess to you to-morrow?"

Monsieur l'Abbé had turned to listen, with dropped eyelids and that air of pain which very holy priests sometimes adopt when they are forced to pay attention to a woman, but as she spoke he lifted his gaze and stared as if very unclerically fascinated, through his blue spectacles.

She paused for his reply. None came; he was still staring. Sharply she repeated her demand. Then the Count started so violently that the whole table shook.

"Impossible, Madame!" he cried. "I have no—no——" He seemed to be searching for a word in his brain, and put up his hand to his neck-cloth as if it choked him.

"Ah! you have no faculties!" exclaimed Mademoiselle Angélique, in deep tragic tones. "If he has no faculties, my dear Athenaïs, the good father cannot absolve you."

A most malicious brightness had sprung into the Marquise's blue eyes, those wonderful blue eyes which had already wrought such havoc with the heart of Elzéar de Valroche. How short a time ago it was, since prostrate at her feet, he had madly implored her to leave the old husband he was certain she did not love, the house that was killing her in gloomy grandeur, and come away with him to the new world; how short a time since that horrible moment when he had thought to have touched ecstasy, when she had seemed to yield, but of a sudden laughed; a moment of overwhelming shame and piercing agony. Would he ever forget it? Could his manhood ever pardon it?

"Ah, there is an absurdity!" cried the Marquise, and the very same laugh tinkled out, delicious, yet cold as the mirth of icicles in the Alps. "In the days in which we live, priests have every permission, for the faithful must have every facility. Am I not right, Monsieur l'Abbé?" she went on, and there was a significance in her air which the false religious felt to the marrow. "The Church is a good mother. She does not enforce these rules in times of disaster."

The Abbé sought in his pocket for a handkerchief, but the Michelins had failed to provide him with one. He was fain to dab his damp forehead with a napkin. Then an idea flashed upon him.

"Madame," he said, in a tragic voice, "you behold in me one who has vowed never to hear a woman's confession."

"Ah, but——" Athenaïs began, then broke off. Her glance wandered up and down the rough-clad figure beside her, rested reflectively upon the hand nearest to her; a strong white hand, singularly

well-cared for to belong to a country priest. Then she said, dulcetly:

"At least, Monsieur l'Abbé, you'll say grace for us," and bent her pretty head, in the plain white muslin cap with the black ribbon, with which Madame Michelin sought in vain to conceal its delicate pride.

The apartment which the Marquise shared with her "cousine de Mortemar" was one of two attics reached through a trap-door, of which, upon emergency, the ladder could be removed.

Monsieur Michelin had engineered more than one cunning hiding-place for his secret guests upon the occasions of the domiciliary visit. The furniture of his secret guest chambers had necessarily to be reduced to the simplest description, so that, when the emergency arose, all traces of occupation could be removed. But Madame Michelin knew that to a court lady certain luxuries were as necessities of existence. Therefore the sheets on the two narrow beds were of the finest linen, the cushions on the single straw armchair, down, covered with rose-coloured silk. The appurtenances on the deal dressing-table mother-of-pearl, gold and tortoiseshell, belonged indeed to the Marquise, but the hairdresser's wife herself bundled them away in that gulf under the loose boards, where were already stowed her garments.

Athenaïs was more than usually petulant. Her first movement on entering the attic had been to tear the cap from her head, and thrusting both hands into the masses of her hair, shake them loose about her face.

"My dear," said Mademoiselle Angélique, who had carefully removed the front, which was an ancient masterpiece of Michelin's, and was now engaged in tying a tiny grey plait with a bit of purple ribbon, "My dear, is it not a touch of balm in our sad lot to think that only yonder partition divides us from so holy a man? One who has made a vow never even to hear a woman's confession, that is being a saint."

"It is being a bad priest," said Athenaïs crossly, from between her curls.

"Ah, my cherished one, you are not so familiar with the lives of the saints as I am!" cried the other. She might be a poor relative, obliged to sit on the edge of her bed in lieu of a chair, but nothing could rob her of the fact that she was a *chanoinesse* and therefore an authority on Church matters. "It's just the kind of thing they did. There was Saint Aloysius——"

"Oh, hold your tongue!" cried the Marquise. She jumped up and began tearing off her cotton jacket and serge skirt as if she loathed even to touch the common things. "Get me out my wadded dove-coloured wrapper. What do you say?"

"I was saying," said the *chanoinesse*, as she meekly rose to obey, "that of course such a vow would not hold if either of us were *in articulo mortis*."

"You mean by your Latin that if we were dying he'd have to confess us?"

"But, my poor child," cried Angélique, in shocked tones, as she stooped over the cavity she had just laid bare, "did not you say so yourself at supper? Why, the last of priests, even a renegade, would not refuse himself to such an office."

"It is well, then," said Athenaïs. "Give me my *douillette*."

She snuggled into the vast enveloping folds, and flung herself into the armchair.

The *chanoinesse* meticulously slipped the sliding boards into place again. Even as the secret spring snapped, the ladder creaked under the tread of the Abbé Coedic; he was coming up to bed.

Athenaïs gave a sharp cry.

"What is the matter?" asked Mademoiselle de Mortemar.

"Is there any ratafia left in the flask?" groaned Madame de la Tremblaye. "Oh, my cousin, if you love me, go and ask la Michelin for a hot brick for my feet. I am afraid I am going to have one of my *pâmoisons*."

"One of your *pâmoisons?*" repeated the elder lady, stupefied.

"One of my heart attacks," said the Marquise, with great decision.

She gave another groan, and added, "They are very dangerous."

The *chanoinesse* stood a moment in doubt; then, seeing that Athenaïs seemed indeed to be the prey of distressing symptoms—panting breath, and upturned eyes—she rushed out of the room and precipitately descended the ladder.

Count Elzéar, in the adjoining attic, had flung himself all dressed on his bed; the long day of exposure and anxiety, the unexpected emotions of the evening, had exhausted him. Strange-coloured visions kept rising before his mind's eye, in which the past and present were blended, and always the face of Athenaïs, mischievous and adorable, was the centre of them.

He had fallen into a kind of half-dream,

when a loud knocking at his door aroused him. He sat up, but before he was able to orient his swimming wits, Michelin stalked into the room. The hairdresser halted mid-way, and gave vent to this astonishing command :

" You are to rise instantly, Monsieur le Comte, and come in to Madame next door. She thinks that she is dying, and she wants to go to confession."

" Just Heaven ! " cried the false Abbé, " what is that you say ? "

" I say, Monsieur le Comte," stepping close to the bed and speaking with the utmost determination, " that you must play the farce to avert a tragedy. My head is in the balance, and the heads of my wife and child. Monsieur le Comte will permit me to remark," he went on, reproachfully, as the unfortunate fugitive remained staring in horror, " that he has played his part very badly, up to this. It is his imbecile remark about the vow that has started that one in there. Oh ! I know her ! If ever there was a spoilt, malicious little creature—God forgive me for speaking of so great a lady in such a manner, but she bores herself, Monsieur le Comte. Oh ! if she were but to guess at Monsieur's identity, not only our heads, but yours and hers—phut ! phut ! "

The barber produced from an inner pocket a miniature purple stole, such as Catholic priests carry on sick calls.

" Monsieur has only to put this round his neck, to mutter a little Latin and hide his head in his hands."

" But, unhappy man," cried the Count, rising and flinging out both hands in a gesture of anathema, " what you propose is blasphemy ! "

Michelin shrugged his shoulders.

" Are you so squeamish, sir ? " Then suddenly his whole countenance changed. He exclaimed with a dark and terrible look : " Do not push me too far. I am risking everything for you, but if you are not honourable with me, why should I be honourable with you ? "

The exquisite little head of Athenaïs became painted in the dimness before the distracted eyes of the man who had long adored her.

" Her head and yours—phut ! " Oh, horrible ! With a low groan he took the stole from the hairdresser's hand, adjusted the blue spectacles, pulled the loosened neckerchief high about his ears, and said : " Show the way, then."

His shoulders were bowed, his head sunk, he went with a slouching step.

" Bravo ! " thought the scheming Michelin. " Continue like that, Monseigneur, and you will not be found out."

Madame de la Tremblaye was still prostrate in the armchair, her beautiful hair falling loose about her shoulders. The *chanoinesse*, loudly ejaculating the while, bent over her from the back, holding a *vinaigrette* to her nostrils. Madame Michelin, on her knees, was chafing the little feet, cold enough in their silk stockings. Anyone could hear how very ill the poor young lady was, for every variation of breathing, from rapid panting to immense sighs, proceeded from the armchair.

" I have brought Monsieur l'Abbé," announced Michelin, in tones which fitted the occasion.

" Ah ! " gasped the moribund, " leave me, all of you, leave me with the holy man."

III

IT is impossible to describe the emotions which filled the breast of the supposititious cleric as he took the seat left for him ; a singular and absurd sense that it was incumbent upon him to act up to his rôle in feeling as well as in deed, and a torrent of pure, human emotion at finding himself associated with what might be the death scene of the woman whom he had so long adored, were added to the overwhelming conviction of atrocious imposture. He could not see her face ; the solitary candle had been placed on the floor behind the invalid, but the light fell full on what was left exposed of his own countenance.

" Give me your blessing, father ! " Athenaïs faintly breathed.

He made a vague sign, and the delicate plaintive whisper of a voice proceeded :

" My father, I am on the brink of eternity. There is a serious transgression on my conscience. Father, I have permitted myself to be courted, I, a married woman——"

This was more than the Count could bear. He started convulsively. Once again he lifted his hand, but it was the involuntary gesture of prohibition ; then he covered his brow and groaned.

Between the scented tangles of her hair, the blue eyes of Athenaïs danced with a strange liveliness for those of a dying woman.

" My father," she went on—her accents

had grown considerably firmer—"I have been coquettish, I admit it. His devotion amused me. My father, understand me. I thought no harm for I did none, only——"

The confessor had again made an agonised movement. A muttered exclamation escaped him.

"Heaven knows you did not!"

"What is that you say, father?"

The voice of Athenaïs was trembling, but it rang far too briskly. She stopped, most pitiably moaned, and then proceeded:

"I have had much remorse since my widowhood——"

The confessor gave a great cry:

"Widowhood? You are widowed?"

His promise to Michelin, the peril that surrounded them were forgotten in that second of ecstasy. If he had stood on the very steps of the guillotine, he must have betrayed himself. Off went his spectacles in one direction, and his muffler in the other. "You are widowed!" he repeated in rapture.

"Alas!" confirmed the Marquise. She made a sinister gesture towards her own pretty throat.

"How? how?" Valroche babbled, scarce knowing what he was saying. "His head?"

"Alas!" said she, for the second time, and turned round in her chair with such an adorable smile that he could not but be certain of the fact which had been gradually dawning upon him that she had known him from the beginning.

"You are not ill, then?" he cried, flinging himself on his knees. "You are free! What should separate us? Live, live for me!"

He felt her slender form quiver beneath his pressure, and the next moment her laughter—the laughter of Athenaïs, so musical, so airy, so silver-toned—broke upon his ears. That laughter had been the death knell of his hopes, but now it was icy no longer: there was a tenderness in it, an emotion, almost a divine hint of tears.

"Ah, ha, ha, ha! You with your vow, Monsieur l'Abbé! I promised myself you would very soon break it. In heaven's name why all the mystery? Did you imagine, by any chance, that I am perhaps in the pay of National Safety? And what folly. Did you take me for an owl? Does a woman forget the hands of the man she loves?"

"Athenaïs!" cried he, and caught her to his breast.

The door creaked open, the *chanoinesse* appeared and uttered a scandalized shriek which brought the worthy Michelin couple hurrying from the next room.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Valroche, releasing the loveliness he had held so passionately clasped, and coming with a dreadful plunge back to reality. "I have broken my word!"

"Do not reproach yourself, my friend," said Athenaïs. "Be quiet, Cousin Angélique. Yes, as you see, it is not a priest, it is Monsieur de Valroche, it is Elzéar, it is my future husband. As for you, my good Michelin, that is not at all a pretty face you are making. What nonsense it has all been! Why, I recognized Monsieur de Valroche in the middle of supper. I laid a little trap for him. I had my moment of fun; do you grudge it to me? After these months of impossible tedium? Ah! Mère Michelin is laughing."

"Madame is always as mischievous as a kitten," said the good woman, giving vent to the suppressed mirth which had apoplectically empurpled her immense face. "And with that, *fine mouche*, a sly puss! What did I tell you, my man? *Mon Dieu*, did I not know, when she sent for her hot brick, that she was up to something?"

But the hairdresser, who had seen the inside of the *conciergerie*, could not so easily be mollified.

"You seem to forget, wife, that it is a question of our heads. Ah! Monseigneur," he added, turning reproachfully upon the Count, "and I who thought I had your word of honour!"

"I can go out of the house this night," cried Valroche, stung.

"And I go with him," said Athenaïs.

The *chanoinesse* burst into tears, and offered, without anyone paying the least attention to her, to let herself be conducted instantly to the scaffold, if that would ease the situation.

"No, no, Athenaïs," cried Valroche, "it is only my presence which endangers our kind hosts. Ah! my beloved, let me go. After this hour I shall die happy."

They made so handsome a pair in their absurdity, and the *ci-devant* court coiffeur was too deeply imbued with ancient traditions not to make the best of a bad job. He shrugged his shoulders.

"*Allons, allons*, then," he said. "There is nothing for it, I suppose, but to get Monsieur le Comte and Madame la Marquise across the water as soon as possible."

The Centurion

Concerning an echo of a long-ago affair

By A. CONAN DOYLE

(*Being the fragment of a letter from Sulpicius Balbus, Legate of the Tenth Legion, to his uncle, Lucius Piso, in his villa near Baiae, dated The Kalends of the month of Augustus in the year* 824 *of Rome.*)

I PROMISED you, my dear uncle, that I would tell you anything of interest concerning the siege of Jerusalem; but, indeed, these people whom we imagined to be unwarlike have kept us so busy that there has been little time for writing. We came to Judæa thinking that a mere blowing of trumpets and a shout would finish the affair, and picturing a splendid triumph in the *via sacra* to follow, with all the girls in Rome throwing flowers and kisses to us. Well, we may get our triumph, and possibly the kisses also, but I assure you that not even you who have seen such hard service on the Rhine can ever have experienced a more severe campaign than this has been. We have now won the town, and to-day their temple is burning, and the smoke sets me coughing as I sit writing in my tent. But it has been a terrible business, and I am sure none of us wishes to see Judæa again.

In fighting the Gauls, or the Germans, you are against brave men, animated by the love of their country. This passion acts more, however, upon some than others, so that the whole army is not equally inflamed by it. These Jews, however, besides their love of country, which is very strong, have a desperate religious fervour, which gives them a fury in battle such as none of us has ever seen. They throw themselves with a shriek of joy upon our swords and lances, as if death were all that they desired.

If one gets past your guard, may Jove protect you, for their knives are deadly, and if it comes to a hand-to-hand grapple they are as dangerous as wild beasts, who would claw out your eyes or your throat. You know that our fellows of the Tenth Legion have been, ever since Cæsar's time, as rough soldiers as any with the Eagles, but I can assure you that I have seen them positively cowed by the fury of these fanatics. As a matter of fact we have had least to bear, for it has been our task from the beginning to guard the base of the peninsula upon which this extraordinary town is built. It has steep precipices on all the other sides, so that it is only on this one northern base that fugitives could escape or a rescue come. Meanwhile, the Fifth, Fifteenth, and the Twelfth or Syrian Legions have done the work, together with the auxiliaries. Poor devils! we have often pitied them, and there have been times when it was difficult to say whether we were attacking the town or the town was attacking us. They broke down our tortoises with their stones, burned our turrets with their fire, and dashed right through our whole camp to destroy our supplies in the rear. If any man says a Jew is not a good soldier, you may be sure that he has never been in Judæa.

However, all this has nothing to do with what I took up my stylus to tell you. No doubt it is the common gossip of the forum and of the baths how the army, excellently handled by the princely Titus, carried one line of wall after the other until we had only the temple before us. This, however, is—or was, for I see it burning even as I write—a very strong fortress. Romans have no idea of the magnificence of this place. The temple of which I speak is a far finer building than any we have in Rome, and so is the palace, built by Herod or Agrippa, I really forget which. This temple is two hundred paces each way, with stones so fitted that the blade of a knife will not go between, and the soldiers say there is gold enough within to fill the pockets of the whole army. This idea puts some fury into the attack, as you can believe, but with these flames I fear that a great deal of the plunder will be lost.

There was a great fight at the temple, and it was rumoured that it would be carried by storm to-night, so I went out on to the rising ground whence one sees the city best. I wonder, uncle, if in your many campaigns

you have ever smelt the smell of a large beleaguered town. The wind was south to-night, and this terrible smell of death came straight to our nostrils. There were half a million people there, and every form of disease, starvation, decomposition, filth and horror, all pent in within a narrow compass. You know how the lion sheds smell behind the Circus Maximus, acid and foul. It is like that, but there is a low, deadly, subtle odour which lies beneath it and makes your very heart sink within you. Such was the smell which came up from the city to-night.

As I stood in the darkness, wrapped in my scarlet chlamys—for the evenings here are chill—I was suddenly aware that I was not alone. A tall, silent figure was near me, looking down at the town even as I was. I could see in the moonlight that he was clad as an officer, and as I approached him I recognised that it was Longinus, third tribune of my own legion, and a soldier of great age and experience. He is a strange, silent man, who is respected by all, but understood by none, for he keeps his own counsel and thinks rather than talks. As I approached him the first flames burst from the temple, a high column of fire, which cast a glow upon our faces and gleamed upon our armour. In this red light I saw that the gaunt face of my companion was set like iron.

"At last!" said he. "At last!"

He was speaking to himself rather than to me, for he started and seemed confused when I asked him what he meant.

"I have long thought that evil would come to the place," said he. "Now I see that it has come, and so I said 'At last!'"

"For that matter," I answered, "we have all seen that evil would come to the place, since it has again and again defied the authority of the Cæsars."

He looked keenly at me with a question in his eyes. Then he said:

"I have heard, sir, that you are one who has a full sympathy in the matter of the gods, believing that every man should worship according to his own conscience and belief."

I answered that I was a Stoic of the school of Seneca, who held that this world is a small matter and that we should care little for its fortunes, but develop within ourselves a contempt for all but the highest.

He smiled in grim fashion at this.

"I have heard," said he, "that Seneca died the richest man in all Nero's Empire so he made the best of this world in spite of his philosophy."

"What are your own beliefs?" I asked. "Are you, perhaps, one who has fathomed the mysteries of Isis, or been admitted to the Society of Mythra?"

"Have you ever heard," he asked, "of the Christians?"

"Yes," said I. "There were some slaves and wandering men in Rome who called themselves such. They worshipped, so far as I could gather, some man who died over here in Judæa. He was put to death, I believe, in the time of Tiberius."

"That is so," he answered. "It was at the time when Pilate was procurator—Pontius Pilate, the brother of Lucius Pilate, who had Egypt in the time of Augustus. Pilate was of two minds in the matter, but the mob was as wild and savage as these very men that we have been contending with. Pilate tried to put them off with a criminal, hoping that so long as they had blood they would be satisfied. But they chose the other, and he was not strong enough to withstand them. Ah! it was a pity—a sad pity!"

"You seem to know a good deal about it," said I.

"I was there," said the man simply, and became silent, while we both looked down at the huge column of flame from the burning temple. As it flared up we could see the white tents of the army and all the country round. There was a low hill just outside the city, and my companion pointed to it.

"That was where it happened," said he. "I forget the name of the place, but in those days—it was more than thirty years ago—they put their criminals to death there. But He was no criminal. It is always His eyes that I think of—the look in His eyes."

"What about the eyes, then?"

"They have haunted me ever since. I see them now. All the sorrow of earth seemed mirrored in them. Sad, sad, and yet such a deep, tender pity! One would have said that it was He who needed pity had you seen His poor battered, disfigured face. But He had no thought for Himself—it was the great world pity that looked out of His gentle eyes. There was a whole maniple of the legion there, and not a man among them who did not wish to charge the howling crowd who were dragging such a man to His death."

"What were you doing there?"

"I was Junior Centurion, with the gold vine-rod fresh on my shoulders. I was on duty on the hill, and never had a job that I liked less. But discipline has to be observed, and Pilate had given the order. But I thought at the time—and I was not the only one—that this man's name and work would not be forgotten, and that there would be a curse on the place that had done such a deed. There was an old woman there, His mother, with her grey hair down her back. I remember how she shrieked when one of our fellows with his lance put Him out of His pain. And a few others, women and men, poor and ragged, stood by Him. But, you see, it has turned out as I thought. Even in Rome, as you have observed, His followers have appeared."

"I rather fancy," said I, "that I am speaking to one of them."

"At least, I have not forgotten," said he. "I have been in wars ever since with little time for study. But my pension is overdue, and when I have changed the sagum for the toga, and the tent for some little farm up Como way, then shall I look more deeply into these things, if, perchance, I can find someone to instruct me."

And so I left him. I only tell you all this because I remember that you took an interest in the man, Paulus, who was put to death for preaching this religion. You told me that it had reached Cæsar's palace, and I can tell you now that it has reached Cæsar's soldiers as well. But apart from this matter I wish to tell you some of the adventures which we have had recently in raiding for food among the hills, which stretch as far south as the river Jordan. The other day . . .

(*Here the fragment is ended.*)

Viewpoints of Youth

YOUTH calls for pleasure, pleasure calls for love. AKENSIDE.

'TIS the defect of Age to rail at the pleasures of youth. MRS. CENTLIVRE.

YOUNG men think old men are fools; but old men know young men are fools. CHAPMAN.

ALMOST everything that is great has been done by youth. DISRAELI.

YOUTH is unselfish in its thoughts and feelings. On that account it feels truth most deeply. HEINE.

YOUTH is the time to study wisdom; old age is the time to practise it. ROUSSEAU.

YOUTH is wholly experimental. R. L. STEVENSON.

A MAN that is young in years may be old in hours, if he have lost no time. BACON.

A YOUNG cowte (colt) will canter, be it uphill or down. SCOTTISH PROVERB.

The Fury

"Love is a spirit, all compact of fire"

By PAUL HEYSE

THE day had scarcely dawned. Over Vesuvius hung one broad grey stripe of mist, stretching across as far as Naples, and darkening all the small towns along the coast. The sea lay calm. Along the shore of the narrow creek that lies beneath the Sorrento cliffs, fishermen and their wives were at work already, some with giant cables drawing their boats to land, with the nets that had been cast the night before, while others were rigging their craft, trimming their sails, or fetching out oars and masts from the great grated vaults that have been built deep into the rocks for shelter to the tackle overnight. Nowhere an idle hand; even the very aged, who had long given up going to sea, fell into the long chain of those who were hauling in the nets. Here and there, on some flat housetop, an old woman stood and spun, or busied herself about her grandchildren, whom their mother had left to help her husband.

"Do you see, Rachela? Yonder is our padre curato," said one to a little thing of ten, who brandished a small spindle by her side; "Antonio is to row him over to Capri. Madre Santissima! but the reverend signore's eyes are dull with sleep!" and she waved her hand to a benevolent-looking priest, who was settling himself in the boat, and spreading out upon the bench his carefully tucked-up skirts.

The men upon the quay had dropped their work to see their pastor off, who bowed and nodded kindly, right and left.

"What for must he go to Capri, granny?" asked the child. "Have the people there no priest of their own, that they must borrow ours?"

"Silly thing!" returned the granny. "Priests they have in plenty—and the most beautiful of churches, and a hermit, too, which is more than we have. But there lives a great signora, who once lived here; she was so very ill! Many's the time our padre had to go and take the Most Holy to her, when they thought she could not live the night. But with the Blessed Virgin's help she got strong and well, and was able to bathe every day in the sea. When she went away, she left a fine heap of ducats behind her for our church, and for the poor; and she would not go, they say, until our padre promised to go and see her over there, that she might confess to him as before. It is quite wonderful, the store she lays by him! Indeed, and we have cause to bless ourselves for having a curato who has gifts enough for an archbishop, and is in such request with all the great folks. The Madonna be with him!" she cried, and waved her hand again, as the boat was about to put from shore.

"Are we to have fair weather, my son?" inquired the little priest, with an anxious look towards Naples.

"The sun is not yet up," the young man answered; "when he comes, he will easily do for that small trifle of mist."

"Off with you, then, that we may arrive before the heat."

Antonio was just reaching for his long oar to shove away the boat when suddenly he paused, and fixed his eyes upon the summit of the steep path that leads down from Sorrento to the water. A tall, slender, girlish figure had become visible upon the heights, and was now hastily stepping down the stones, waving her handkerchief. She had a small bundle under her arm, and her dress was mean and poor. Yet she had a distinguished if somewhat savage way of throwing back her head, and the dark tress wreathed around it like a diadem.

"What have we to wait for?" inquired the curato.

"There is someone coming who wants to go to Capri—with your permission, padre. We shall not go a whit the slower. It is a slight young thing, but just eighteen."

At that moment the young girl appeared from behind the wall that bounds the winding path.

"Laurella!" cried the priest. "And what has she to do in Capri?"

Antonio shrugged his shoulders. She came up with hasty steps, her eyes fixed straight before her.

"Ha! l'Arrabiata! Good morning!" shouted one or two of the young boatmen. But for the curato's presence, they might have added more; the look of mute defiance with which the young girl received their welcome appeared to tempt the more mischievous among them.

"Good day, Laurella!" now said the priest. "How are you? Are you coming with us to Capri?"

"If I may, padre."

"Ask Antonio there; the boat is his. Every man is master of his own, I say, as God is Master of us all."

"There is half a carlino, if I may go for that?" said Laurella, without looking at the young boatman.

"You need it more than I," he muttered, and pushed aside some orange-baskets to make room; he was to sell the oranges in Capri, which little isle of rocks has never been able to grow enough for all its visitors.

"I do not choose to go for nothing," said the girl, with a slight frown of her dark eyebrows.

"Come, child," said the priest; "he is a good lad, and had rather not enrich himself with that little morsel of your poverty. Come now, and step in," and he stretched out his hand to help her, "and sit you down by me. See, now, he has spread his jacket for you, that you may sit the softer. Young folks are all alike; for one little maiden of eighteen they will do more than for ten of us reverend fathers. Nay, no excuse, Tonino. It is the Lord's own doing, that like and like should hold together."

Meantime Laurella had stepped in, and seated herself beside the padre, first putting away Antonio's jacket without a word. The young fellow let it lie, and, muttering between his teeth, he gave one vigorous push against the pier, and the little boat flew out into the open bay.

"What are you carrying there in that little bundle?" inquired the padre, as they were floating on over a calm sea, now just beginning to be lighted up with the earliest rays of the rising sun.

"Silk, thread and a loaf, padre. The silk is to be sold at Anacapri, to a woman who makes ribbons, and the thread to another."

"Spun by yourself?"

"Yes, sir."

"You once learned to weave ribbons yourself, if I remember right?"

"I did, sir; but mother has been much worse, and I cannot stay so long from home; and a loom to ourselves we are not rich enough to buy."

"Worse, is she? Ah! dear, dear! when I was with you last, at Easter, she was up."

"The spring is always her worst time. Ever since those last great storms, and the earthquakes she has been forced to keep her bed from pain."

"Pray, my child. Never slacken your prayers and petitions that the Blessed Virgin may intercede for you; and be industrious and good, that your prayers may find a hearing."

After a pause: "When you were coming towards the shore, I heard them calling after you. 'Good morning, l'Arrabiata!' they said. What made them call you so? It is not a nice name for a young Christian maiden, who should be meek and mild."

The young girl's brown face glowed all over, while her eyes flashed with fire.

"They always mock me so, because I do not dance and sing, and stand about and chatter, as other girls do. I might be left in peace, I think; I do *them* no harm."

"Nay, but you might be civil. Let others dance and sing, on whom this life sits lighter; but a kind word now and then is seemly, even from the most afflicted."

Her dark eyes fell, and she drew her eyebrows closer over them, as if she would have hidden them.

They went on a while in silence. The sun now stood resplendent above the mountain chain; only the tip of Mount Vesuvius towered beyond the group of clouds that had gathered about its base; and on the Sorrento plains the houses were gleaming white from the dark green of their orange gardens.

"Have you heard no more of that painter, Laurella?" asked the curato — "that Neapolitan, who wished so much to marry you?" She shook her head. "He came to make a picture of you. Why would you not let him?"

"What did he want for it? There are handsomer girls than I. Who knows what he would have done with it? He might have bewitched me with it, or hurt my soul, or even killed me, mother says."

"Never believe such sinful things!" said the little curato very earnestly. "Are not you ever in God's keeping, without Whose

will not one hair of your head can fall? And is one poor mortal with an image in his hand to prevail against the Lord? Besides, you might have seen that he was fond of you; else why should he want to marry you?"

She said nothing.

"And wherefore did you refuse him? He was an honest man, they say, and comely; and he would have kept you and your mother far better than you ever can yourself, for all your spinning and silk-winding."

"We are so poor!" she said passionately; "and mother has been ill so long, we should have become a burden to him. And then I never should have done for a signora. When his friends came to see him, he would only have been ashamed of me."

"How can you say so? I tell you the man was good and kind; he would even have been willing to settle in Sorrento. It will not be so easy to find another, sent straight from Heaven to be the saving of you, as this man, indeed, appeared to be."

"I want no husband—I never shall," she said, very stubbornly, half to herself.

"Is this a vow? Or do you mean to be a nun?"

She shook her head.

"The people are not so wrong who call you wilful, although the name they give you is not kind. Have you ever considered that you stand alone in the world, and that your perverseness must make your sick mother's illness worse to bear, her life more bitter? And what sound reason can you have to give for rejecting an honest hand, stretched out to help you and your mother? Answer me, Laurella."

"I have a reason," she said reluctantly, and speaking low: "but it is one I cannot give."

"Not give! Not give to me? Not to your confessor, whom you surely know to be your friend—or is he not?"

Laurella nodded.

"Then, child, unburden your heart. If your reason be a good one, I shall be the first to uphold you in it. Only you are young, and know so little of the world. A time may come when you will find cause to regret a chance of happiness thrown away for some foolish fancy now."

Shyly she threw a furtive glance over to the other end of the boat, where the young boatman sat, rowing fast. His woollen cap was pulled deep down over his eyes; he was gazing across the water, with averted head, sunk, as it appeared, in his own meditations.

The priest observed her look, and bent his ear down closer.

"You did not know my father?" she whispered, while a dark look gathered in her eyes.

"Your father, child! Why, your father died when you were ten years old. What can your father (Heaven rest his soul in Paradise!) have to do with this present perversity of yours?"

"You did not know him, padre; you did not know that mother's illness was caused by him alone."

"And how?"

"By his ill-treatment of her; he beat her and trampled upon her. I well remember the nights when he came home in his fits of frenzy. She never said a word, and did everything he bade her. Yet he would beat her so, my heart felt ready to break. I used to cover up my head and pretend to be asleep, but I cried all night. And then, when he saw her lying on the floor, quite suddenly he would change, and lift her up and kiss her till she screamed and said he smothered her. Mother forbade me ever to say a word of this; but it wore her out. And in all these long years since father died, she has never been able to get well again. And if she should soon die—which God forbid!—I know who it was that killed her."

The little curato's head wagged slowly to and fro; he seemed uncertain how far to acquiesce in the young girl's reasons. At length he said: "Forgive him, as your mother has forgiven! And turn your thoughts from such distressing pictures, Laurella; there may be better days in store for you, which will make you forget the past."

"Never shall I forget that!" she said, and shuddered. "And you must know, padre, it is the reason why I have resolved to remain unmarried. I never will be subject to a man, who may beat and then caress me. Were a man now to want to beat or kiss me, I could defend myself; but mother could not—neither from his blows nor his kisses—because she loved him. Now, I will never so love a man as to be made ill and wretched by him."

"You are but a child, and you talk like one who knows nothing at all of life. Are all men like that poor father of yours? Do all ill-treat their wives, and give vent to every whim and gust of passion? Have

you never seen a good man yet? Or know good wives, who live in peace and harmony with their husbands?"

"But nobody ever knew how father was to mother; she would have died sooner than complain or tell of him, and all because she loved him. If this be love—if love can close our lips when they should cry out for help—if it is to make us suffer without resistance, worse than even our worst enemy could make us suffer—then, I say, I never will be fond of mortal man."

"I tell you you are childish; you know not what you are saying. When your time comes, you are not likely to be consulted whether you choose to fall in love or not." After a pause, he added: "And that painter; did you think he could have been cruel?"

"He made those eyes I have seen my father make, when he begged my mother's pardon and took her in his arms to make it up. I know those eyes. A man may make such eyes, and yet find it in his heart to beat a wife who never did a thing to vex him! It made my flesh creep to see those eyes again."

After this she would not say another word. The curato also remained silent. He bethought himself of more than one wise saying, wherewith the maiden might have been admonished; but he refrained, in consideration of the young boatman, who had been growing rather restless toward the close of this confession.

When, after two hours' rowing, they reached the little bay of Capri, Antonio took the padre in his arms, and carried him through the last few ripples of shallow water, to set him reverently down upon his legs on dry land. But Laurella did not wait for him to wade back and fetch her. Gathering up her little petticoat, holding in one hand her wooden shoes and in the other her little bundle, with one splashing step or two she had reached the shore. "I have some time to stay in Capri," said the priest. "You need not wait—I may not perhaps return before to-morrow. When you get home, Laurella, remember me to your mother; I will come and see her within the week. You mean to go back before it gets dark?"

"If I find an opportunity," answered the girl, turning all her attention to her skirts.

"I must return, you know," said Antonio, in a tone which he believed to be one of great indifference. "I shall wait here till the Ave Maria. If you should not come, it is the same to me."

"You must come," interposed the priest; "you never can leave your mother all alone at night. Is it far you have to go?"

"To a vineyard by Anacapri."

"And I to Capri. So now God bless you, child—and you, my son."

Laurella kissed his hand, and let one farewell drop, for the padre and Antonio to divide between them. Antonio, however, appropriated no part of it to himself; he pulled off his cap exclusively to the padre, without even looking at Laurella. But after they had turned their backs, he let his eyes travel but a short way from the padre, as he went toiling over the deep bed of small, loose stones; he soon sent them after the maiden, who, turning to the right, had begun to climb the heights, holding one hand above her eyes to protect them from the scorching sun. Just before the path disappeared behind the walls, she stopped, as if to gather breath, and looked behind her. At her feet lay the marina; the rugged rocks rose high around her; the sea was shining in the rarest of its deep-blue splendour. The scene was surely worth a moment's pause. But, as chance would have it, her eyes, in glancing past Antonio's boat, met Antonio's own, which had been following her as she climbed.

Each made a slight movement, as persons do who would excuse themselves for some mistake; and then, with her darkest look, the maiden went her way.

¶

HARDLY one hour passed since noon, and yet, for the last two, Antonio had been sitting waiting on the bench before the fisher's tavern. He must have been very much preoccupied with something, for he jumped up every moment to step out into the sunshine, and look carefully up and down the roads, which, parting right and left, lead to the only two little towns upon the island. He did not altogether trust the weather, he then said to the hostess of the osteria; to be sure, it was clear enough, but he did not quite like that tint of sea and sky. Just so it had looked, he said, before the last awful storm, when the English family had been so nearly lost; surely she must remember it?

No, indeed, she said, she didn't.

Well, if the weather should happen to

change before night, she was to think of him, he said.

"Have you many fine folk over there?" she asked him, after a while.

"They are only just beginning; as yet, the season has been bad enough; those who came to bathe, came late."

"The spring came late. Have you not been earning more than we at Capri?"

"Not enough to give me macaroni twice a week, if I had had nothing but the boat—only a letter now and then to take to Naples, or a gentleman to row out into the open sea, that he might fish. But you know I have an uncle who is rich; he owns more than one fine orange-garden; and, 'Tonino,' says he to me, 'while I live you shall not suffer want; and when I am gone you will find that I have taken care of you.' And so, with God's help, I got through the winter."

"Has he children, this uncle who is rich?"

"No, he never married; he was long in foreign parts, and many a good piastre he has laid together. He is going to set up a great fishing business, and set me over it, to see the rights of it."

"Why, then you are a made man, Tonino!"

The young boatman shrugged his shoulders. "Every man has his own burden," said he, starting up again to have another look at the weather, turning his eyes right and left, although he must have known that there can be no weather side but one.

"Let me fetch you another bottle," said the hostess; "your uncle can well afford to pay for it."

"Not more than one glass; it is a fiery wine you have in Capri, and my head is hot already."

"It does not heat the blood; you may drink as much of it as you like. And here is my husband coming; so you must sit awhile, and talk to him."

And in fact, with his nets over his shoulder, and his red cap upon his curly head, down came the comely padrone of the osteria. He had been taking a dish of fish to that great lady, to set before the little curato. As soon as he caught sight of the young boatman he began waving him a most cordial welcome, and he came to sit beside him on the bench, chattering and asking questions. Just as his wife was bringing her second bottle of pure, unadulterated Capri, they heard the crisp sand crunch, and Laurella was seen approaching from the left-hand road to Anacapri. She nodded slightly in salutation; then stopped, and hesitated.

Antonio sprang from his seat. "I must go," he said. "It is a young Sorrento girl, who came over with the signor curato in the morning. She has to get back to her sick mother before night."

"Well, well, time enough yet before night," observed the fisherman; "time enough to take a glass of wine. Wife, I say, another glass!"

"I thank you; I had rather not"; and Laurella kept her distance.

"Fill the glasses, wife; fill them both, I say; she only wants a little pressing."

"Don't," interposed the lad. "It is a wilful head of her own she has; a saint could not persuade her to what she does not choose." And, taking a hasty leave, he ran down to the boat, loosened the rope, and stood waiting for Laurella. Again she bent her head to the hostess, and slowly approached the water, with lingering steps. She looked around on every side, as if in hopes of seeing some other passenger, but the marina was deserted. The fishermen were asleep, or rowing about the coasts with rods or nets; a few women and children sat before their doors, spinning or sleeping; such strangers as had come over in the morning were waiting for the cool of the evening to return. She had not time to look about her long; before she could prevent him, Antonio had seized her in his arms and carried her to the boat, as if she had been an infant. He leaped in after her, and with a stroke or two of his oar they were in deep water.

She had seated herself at the end of the boat, half-turning her back to him, so that he could only see her profile. She wore a sterner look than ever; the low, straight brow was shaded by her hair; the rounded lips were firmly closed; only the delicate nostril occasionally gave a wilful quiver. After they had gone on a while in silence, she began to feel the scorching of the sun; and, unloosening her bundle, she threw the handkerchief over her head, and began to make her dinner of the bread; for in Capri she had eaten nothing.

Antonio did not stand this long; he fetched out a couple of oranges with which the baskets had been filled in the morning. "Here is something to eat to your bread, Laurella," he said. "Don't think I kept them for you; they had rolled out of the basket, and I only found them

when I brought the baskets back to the boat."

"Eat them yourself; bread is enough for me."

"They are refreshing in this heat, and you have had to walk so far."

"They gave me a drink of water, and that refreshed me."

"As you please," he said, and let them drop into the basket.

Silence again. The sea was smooth as glass. Not a ripple was heard against the prow. Even the white sea-birds that roost among the caves of Capri pursued their prey with soundless flight.

"You might take the oranges to your mother," again commenced Tonino.

"We have oranges at home; and when they are gone I can go and buy some more."

"Nay, take these to her, and give them to her with my compliments."

"She does not know you."

"You could tell her who I am."

"I do not know you, either."

It was not the first time that she had denied him thus. One Sunday of last year, when that painter had first come to Sorrento, Antonio had chanced to be playing *boccia* with some other young fellows in the little piazza by the chief street.

There, for the first time, had the painter caught sight of Laurella, who, with her pitcher on her head, had passed by without taking any notice of him. The Neapolitan, struck by her appearance, stood still and gazed after her, not heeding that he was standing in the very midst of the game, which, with two steps, he might have cleared. A very ungentle ball came knocking against his shins, as a reminder that this was not the spot to choose for meditation. He looked round, as if in expectation of some excuse. But the young boatman who had thrown the ball stood silent among his friends, in such an attitude of defiance that the stranger had found it more advisable to go his ways and avoid discussion. Still, this little encounter had been spoken of, particularly at the time when the painter had been pressing his suit to Laurella. "I do not even know him," she said indignantly, when the painter asked her whether it was for the sake of that uncourteous lad she now refused him. But she had heard that piece of gossip, and known Antonio well enough when she had met him since.

And now they sat together in this boat, like two most deadly enemies, while their hearts were beating fit to kill them. Antonio's usually so good-humoured face was heated to scarlet; he struck the oars so sharply that the foam flew over to where Laurella sat, while his lips moved as if muttering angry words. She pretended not to notice, wearing her most unconscious look, bending over the edge of the boat, and letting the cool water pass between her fingers. Then she threw off her handkerchief again, and began to smooth her hair, as though she had been alone. Only her eyebrows twitched, and she held up her wet hands in vain attempts to cool her burning cheeks.

Now they were well out in the open sea. The island was far behind, and the coast before them lay yet distant in the hot haze. Not a sail was within sight, far or near—not even a passing gull to break the stillness. Antonio looked all round, evidently ripening some hasty resolution. The colour faded suddenly from his cheek, and he dropped his oars. Laurella looked round involuntarily—fearless, yet attentive.

"I must make an end of this," the young fellow burst forth. "It has lasted too long already! I only wonder that it has not killed me! You say you do not know me? And all this time you must have seen me pass you like a madman, my whole heart full of what I had to tell you; and then you only made your crossest mouth, and turned your back upon me."

"What had I to say to you?" she curtly replied. "I may have seen that you were inclined to meddle with me, but I do not choose to be on people's wicked tongues for nothing. I do not mean to have you for a husband—neither you nor any other."

"Nor any other? So you will not always say! You say so now, because you would not have that painter. Bah, you were but a child! You will feel lonely even yet, some day; and then, wild as you are, you will take the next best who comes to hand."

"Who knows? Which of us can see the future? It may be that I will change my mind. What is that to you?"

"What is it to me?" he flew out, starting to his feet, while the small boat leaped and danced. "What is it to me, you say? You know well enough! I tell you, that man shall perish miserably to whom you shall prove kinder than you have been to me!"

"And to you, what did I ever promise? Am I to blame if you be mad? What right have you to me?"

"Ah! I know," he cried, "my right is written nowhere. It has not been put in Latin by any lawyer, nor stamped with any seal. But this I feel: I have just the right to you that I have to heaven, if I die an honest Christian. Do you think I could look on and see you go to church with another man, and see the girls go by and shrug their shoulders at me?"

"You can do as you please. I am not going to let myself be frightened by all those threats. I also mean to do as I please."

"You shall not say so long!" and his whole frame shook with passion. "I am not the man to let my whole life be spoiled by a stubborn wench like you! You are in my power here, remember, and may be made to do my bidding."

She could not repress a start, but her eyes flashed bravely on him.

"You may kill me if you dare," she said slowly.

"I do nothing by halves," he said, and his voice sounded choked and hoarse. "There is room for us both in the sea. I cannot help thee, child"—he spoke the last words dreamily, almost pitifully—"but we must both go down together—both at once—and now!" he shouted, and snatched her in his arms. But at the same moment he drew back his right hand; the blood gushed out; she had bitten him fiercely.

"Ha! can I be made to do your bidding?" she cried, and thrust him from her, with one sudden movement. "Am I here in your power?" and she leaped into the sea, and sank.

She rose again directly; her scanty skirts clung close; her long hair, loosened by the waves, hung heavy about her neck. She struck out valiantly, and, without uttering a sound, she began to swim steadily from the boat toward the shore.

With senses benumbed by sudden terror, he stood, with outstretched neck, looking after her, his eyes fixed as though they had just been witness to a miracle. Then, giving himself a shake, he seized his oars, and began rowing after her with all the strength he had, while all the time the bottom of the boat was reddening fast with the blood that kept streaming from his hand.

Rapidly as she swam, he was at her side in a moment. "For the love of our most Holy Virgin," he cried, "get into the boat! I have been a madman! God alone can tell what so suddenly darkened my brain. It came upon me like a flash of lightning and set me all on fire. I knew not what I did or said. I do not even ask you to forgive me, Laurella, only to come into the boat again and not to risk your life!"

She swam on as though she had not heard him.

"You can never swim to land. I tell you it is two miles off. Think of your mother! If you should come to grief, I should die of horror."

She measured the distance with her eyes, and then, without answering him one word, she swam up to the boat, and laid her hands upon the edge; he rose to help her in. As the boat tilted over to one side with the girl's weight, his jacket, that was lying on the bench, slipped into the water. Agile as she was, she swung herself on board without assistance, and gained her former seat. As soon as he saw that she was safe, he took his oars again, while she began quietly wringing out her dripping clothes, and shaking the water from her hair. As her eyes fell upon the bottom of the boat, and saw the blood, she gave a quick look at the hand, which held the oar as if it had been unhurt.

"Take this," she said, and held out her handkerchief. He shook his head, and went on rowing. After a time she rose, and, stepping up to him, bound the handkerchief firmly round the wound, which was very deep. Then, heedless of his endeavours to prevent her, she took an oar, and, seating herself opposite him, began to row with steady strokes, keeping her eyes from looking toward him—fixed upon the oar that was scarlet with blood. Both were pale and silent. As they drew near land, such fishermen as they met began shouting after Antonio and gibing at Laurella; but neither of them moved an eyelid, or spoke one word.

The sun stood yet high over Procida when they landed at the marina. Laurella shook out her petticoat, now nearly dry, and jumped on shore. The old spinning woman, who, in the morning, had seen them start, was still upon the terrace. She called down, "What is that upon your hand, Tonino? Jesus Christ! the boat is full of blood!"

"It is nothing, comare," the young fellow replied. "I tore my hand against a nail that was sticking too far; it will be well to-morrow. It is only this confounded

ready blood of mine, that always makes a thing look worse than it is."

"Let me come and bind it up, comparello. Stop one moment; I will go and fetch the herbs, and come to you directly."

"Never trouble yourself, comare. It has been dressed already; to-morrow morning it will be all over and forgotten. I have a healthy skin that heals directly."

"Addio!" said Laurella, turning to the path that goes winding up the cliffs. "Good night!" he answered, without looking at her; and then taking his oars and baskets from the boat, and climbing up the small stone stairs, he went into his own hut.

¶

HE was alone in his two little rooms, and began to pace up and down them. Cooler than upon the dead-calm sea, the breeze blew fresh through the small, unglazed windows, which could only be closed with wooden shutters. The solitude was soothing to him. He stooped before the little image of the Virgin, devoutly gazing upon the glory round the head (made of stars cut in silver paper). But he did not want to pray. What reason had he to pray, now that he had lost all that he had ever hoped for?

And this day appeared to last for ever. He did so long for night! For he was weary, and more exhausted by the loss of blood than he would have cared to own. His hand was very sore. Seating himself upon a little stool, he untied the handkerchief that bound it; the blood, so long repressed, gushed out again; all round the wound the hand was swollen high.

He washed it carefully, cooling it in the water; then he clearly saw the marks of Laurella's teeth.

"She was right," he said; "I was a brute, and deserved no better. I will send her back the handkerchief by Giuseppe to-morrow. Never shall she set eyes on me again." And he washed the handkerchief with the greatest care, and spread it out in the sun to dry.

And having bound up his hand again, as well as he could manage with his teeth and his left hand, he threw himself upon his bed, and closed his eyes.

He was soon waked up from a sort of slumber by the rays of the bright moonlight, and also by the pain of his hand; he had just risen for more cold water to soothe its throbbings, when he heard the sound of someone at the door. Laurella stood before him.

She came in without a question, took off the handkerchief she had tied over her head, and placed her little basket upon the table; then she drew a deep breath.

"You are come to fetch your handkerchief," he said. "You need not have taken that trouble. In the morning I would have asked Giuseppe to take it to you."

"It is not the handkerchief," she said quickly. "I have been up among the hills to gather herbs to stop the blood; see here." And she lifted the lid of her little basket.

"Too much trouble," he said, not in bitterness—"far too much trouble. I am better, much better; but if I were worse, it would be no more than I deserve. Why did you come at such a time? If anyone should see you? You know how they talk, even when they don't know what they are saying."

"I care for no one's talk," she said passionately. "I came to see your hand, and put the herbs upon it; you cannot do it with your left."

"It is not worth while, I tell you."

"Let me see it, then, if I am to believe you."

She took his hand, that was not able to prevent her, and unbound the linen. When she saw the swelling, she shuddered, and gave a cry: "Jesus Maria!"

"It is a little swollen," he said; "it will be over in four-and-twenty hours."

She shook her head. "It will certainly be a week before you can go to sea."

"More likely a day or two; and if not, what matters?"

She had fetched a basin, and began carefully washing out the wound, which he suffered passively, like a child. She then laid on the healing leaves, which at once relieved the burning pain, and finally bound it up with the linen she had brought with her.

When it was done: "I thank you," he said. "And now, if you would do me one more kindness, forgive the madness that came over me; forget all I said and did. I cannot tell how it came to pass; certainly it was not your fault—not yours. And never shall you hear from me again one word to vex you."

She interrupted him. "It is I who have to beg your pardon. I should have spoken differently. I might have explained it

better, and not enraged you with my sullen ways. And now that bite——"

"It was done in self-defence; it was high time to bring me to my senses. As I said before, it is nothing at all to signify. Do not talk of being forgiven; you only did me good, and I thank you for it. And now, here is your handkerchief; take it with you."

He held it to her, but yet she lingered, hesitated, and appeared to have some inward struggle. At length she said: "You have lost your jacket, and by my fault; and I know that all the money for the oranges was in it. I did not think of this till afterward. I cannot replace it now; we have not so much at home—or if we had, it would be mother's. But this I have—this silver cross. That painter left it on the table the day he came for the last time. I have never looked at it all this while, and do not care to keep it in my box; if you were to sell it? It must be worth a few piastres, mother says. It might make up the money you have lost; and if not quite, I could earn the rest by spinning at night when mother is asleep."

"Nothing will make me take it," he said shortly, pushing away the bright new cross which she had taken from her pocket.

"You must," she said; "how can you tell how long your hand may keep you from your work? There it lies; and nothing can make me so much as look at it again."

"Drop it into the sea, then."

"It is no present I want to make you; it is no more than is your due; it is only fair."

"Nothing from you can be due to me; and hereafter, when we chance to meet, if you would do me a kindness, I beg you not to look my way. It would make me feel you were thinking of what I have done. And now good night; and let this be the last word said."

She laid the handkerchief in the basket, and also the cross, and closed the lid. But when he looked into her face, he started. Great heavy drops were rolling down her cheeks; she let them flow unheeded.

"Maria Santissima!" he cried. "Are you ill? You are trembling from head to foot!"

"It is nothing," she said; "I must go home"; and with unsteady steps she was moving to the door, when suddenly she leaned her brow against the wall, and gave way to a fit of bitter sobbing. Before he could go to her she turned upon him, suddenly, and fell upon his neck.

"I cannot bear it!" she cried, clinging to him as a dying thing to life—"I cannot bear it! I cannot let you speak so kindly, and bid me go, with all this on my conscience. Beat me! trample on me! curse me! Or if it can be that you love me still, after all I have done to you, take me and keep me, and do with me as you please; only do not send me away so!" She could say no more for sobbing.

Speechless, he held her a while in his arms. "If I can love you still!" he cried at last. "Holy Mother of God! Do you think that all my best heart's blood has gone from me through that little wound? Don't you hear it hammering now, as though it would burst my breast and go to you? But if you say this to try me, or because you pity me, I can forget it. You are not to think you owe me this, because you know what I have suffered for you."

"No!" she said very resolutely, looking up from his shoulder into his face with her tearful eyes: "It is because I love you; and let me tell you, it was because I always feared to love you that I was so cross. I will be so different now. I never could bear to pass you in the street without one look! And lest you should ever feel a doubt, I will kiss you, that you may say, 'She kissed me,' and Laurella kisses no man but her husband."

She kissed him thrice, and, escaping from his arms: "And now good night, amor mio, cara vita mia!" she said. "Lie down to sleep, and let your hand get well. Do not come with me; I am afraid of no man, save of you alone."

And so she slipped out, and soon disappeared in the shadow of the wall.

He remained standing by the window, gazing far out over the calm sea, while all the stars in Heaven seemed to flit before his eyes.

¶

THE next time the little curato sat in his confessional, he sat smiling to himself. Laurella had just risen from her knees after a very long confession.

"Who would have thought it?" he said amusingly—"that the Lord would so soon have taken pity upon that wayward little heart? And I had been reproaching myself for not having adjured more sternly that ill demon of perversity. Our eyes are but short-sighted to see the ways of Heaven! Well, may God bless her, I say, and let me live to go to sea with Laurella's eldest born rowing in his father's place! Ah! well, indeed! l'Arrabiata!"

The Spirit of Joy

Expressed in Dancing

IT was not quadrille dancing, nor minuet dancing, nor even country-dance dancing. It was neither in the old style nor the new style, nor the French style, nor the English style; though it may have been, by accident, a trifle in the Spanish style, which is a free and joyous one, I am told, deriving a delightful air of off-hand inspiration from the chirping little castanets. As they danced among the orchard trees, and down the groves of stems and back again, and twirled each other lightly round and round, the influence of their airy motion seemed to spread and spread, in the sun-lighted scene, like an expanding circle in the water. Their streaming hair and fluttering skirts, the elastic grass beneath their feet, the boughs that rustled in the morning air—the flashing leaves, their speckled shadows on the soft green ground—the balmy wind that swept along the landscape, glad to turn the distant windmill, cheerily—everything between the two girls, and the man and team at plough upon the ridge of land, where they showed against the sky as if they were the last things in the world—seemed dancing, too. Charles Dickens.

Delight of the Mind

JOY is a delight of the mind, from the consideration of the present or assured approaching possession of a good: and we are then possessed of any good when we have it so in our power that we can use it when we please. Thus a man almost starved has joy at the arrival of relief, even before he has the pleasure of using it; and a father, in whom the very well-being of his children causes delight, is always, as long as his children are in such a state, in the possession of that good; for he needs but to reflect on it to have that pleasure. John Locke.

EVER man climbs by his joys and the urge of desire,
Upward and outwards a step to the wider and higher;
Larger and grander his note in the infinite choir.

Larger and grander and higher the ring of his soul
Chimes to the rhythmic design of the infinite whole,
Leads by the pathway of joy to the ultimate goal.

Arthur Maquarie.

Scenes of Smiling Plenty

THE cheerful man hears the lark in the morning; the pensive man hears the nightingale in the evening. The cheerful man sees the cock strut, and hears the horn and hounds echo in the wood; then walks, not unseen, to observe the glory of the rising sun, or listen to the singing milkmaid, and view the labours of the plougher and the mower; then casts his eyes about him over scenes of smiling plenty, and looks up to the distant tower, the residence of some fair inhabitant; thus he pursues real gaiety through a day of labour or of play, and delights himself at night with the fanciful narratives of superstitious ignorance.

Samuel Johnson.

Cheerfulness Grows by Continuance

THE Christian heaven promises no pleasures, like the Turkish, but the clear, pure, infinite ether of heavenly joy, which flows from the contemplation of the Eternal. The foretaste of heaven—Paradise, to which the theologians denied pleasures, but not cheerfulness—sheltered innocence. The cheerful man wins our eye and heart, as the morose man drives both away; it is the contrary with pleasures, we turn our back on the luxurious, and open our heart to the starving. If pleasure be a self-consuming rocket, cheerfulness is a returning light star, an object which, unlike pleasure, is not worn away by continuance, but receives from it new birth. Jean Paul Richter.

HE who hath caught the Muse's smile,
And lived with her a little while,
Can never be as other men,
Or stand on common earth again.

He nevermore can quite forego
A reflex of the early glow;
But on his face must linger yet
Traces of glory that hath set.

And still in secret thought there stays
Remembrance of the godlike days,
And in his speech, though words be few,
The larger utterance that he knew.

Arthur L. Salmon.

An Aid to Longevity

DEMOCRITUS, who was always laughing, lived one hundred and nine years; Heraclitus, who never ceased crying, only sixty. Laughing, then, is best. George Steevens.

Music's Universal Enjoyment

ON a sudden there springs up a lively little air, expressive of some natural feeling, though in point of science not worth a halfpenny; the audience all spring up, every head nods, every foot beats time, and every heart also; a universal smile breaks out on every face; and every one agrees that music is the most delightful rational enjoyment that the human mind can possibly enjoy. Sydney Smith.

Sensation Indescribable

HEAVENLY joy in its essence cannot be described . . . it is as if the inner mind were fully open and free to receive the delight and blessedness which are diffused into every fibre, and thus throughout their whole being. The perception and sensation of this joy is indescribable.

Emanuel Swedenborg.

Morning Exultation

"DASH it, wot a mornin' it is!" exclaimed Mr. Jorrocks, turning up his jolly face, beaming with exultation; "wot a many delicious moments one loses by smooterin' i' bed!—dash my vig! if I won't get up at five every mornin' as long as I live!"

Robert Smith Surtees.

The World a Looking-Glass

THE world is a looking-glass, and gives back to every man the reflection of his own face. Frown at it, and it will in turn look sourly upon you: laugh at it and with it, and it is a jolly, kind companion; and so let all young persons take their choice.

William Makepeace Thackeray.

THE world is given unto a happy clan.
Clap thou thy hands, O Life, for thou hast heard
The wizard music and the wonder-word
Which at the dawn-time of creation ran
Tipping the stars with fire, the flowers with flame.
In high employ
Laugh, spirit, leap and sing! uplift the name
Of Joy! Joy! Joy!

James A. Mackereth.

A Symphony of Laughter

CONVERSATION never sits easier than when we now and then discharge ourselves in a symphony of laughter; which may not improperly be called the chorus conversation.

Sir Richard Steele.

HASTE thee, nymph, and bring with thee
Jest and youthful jollity,
Quips and cranks and wanton wiles,
Nods and becks, and wreathèd smiles,
Such as hang on Hebe's cheek
And love to live in dimple sleek;
Sport that wrinkled Care derides,
And Laughter holding both his sides.
Come, and trip it as you go
On the light fantastic toe;
And in thy right hand lead with thee
The mountain nymph, sweet Liberty;
And, if I give thee honour due,
Mirth, admit me of thy crew.

John Milton.

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The Siege of Berlin

Of an event elsewhere unrecorded

By ALPHONSE DAUDET

(*Translated by* GEORGE BURNHAM IVES.)

WE were going up Avenue des Champs-Élysées with Dr. V——, asking the shell-riddled walls, and the sidewalks torn up by grape-shot, for the story of the siege of Paris, when, just before we reached the Rondpoint de l'Etoile, the doctor stopped and, pointing to one of the great corner houses so proudly grouped about the Arc de Triomphe, said to me:

"Do you see those four closed windows up there on that balcony? In the early days of August, that terrible August of last year, so heavily laden with storms and disasters, I was called there to see a case of apoplexy. It was the apartment of Colonel Jouve, a cuirassier of the First Empire, an old enthusiast on the subject of glory and patriotism, who had come to live on the Champs-Elysées, in an apartment with a balcony, at the outbreak of the war. Guess why? In order to witness the triumphant return of our troops. Poor old fellow! The news of Wissembourg reached him just as he was leaving the table. When he read the name of Napoleon at the foot of that bulletin of defeat, he fell like a log.

"I found the former cuirassier stretched out at full length on the carpet, his face covered with blood, and as lifeless as if he had received a blow on the head from a poleaxe. He must have been very tall when he was standing; lying there, he looked enormous. Handsome features, magnificent teeth, a fleece of curly white hair, eighty years with the appearance of sixty. Beside him was his grand-daughter, on her knees and bathed in tears. She looked like him. One who saw them side by side might have taken them for two beautiful Greek medallions, struck from the same die, one of which was old and earth-coloured, a little roughened on the edges, the other resplendent and clean-cut, in all the brilliancy and smoothness of a fresh impression.

"The child's grief touched me. Daughter and grand-daughter of soldiers, her father was on MacMahon's staff, and the image of that tall old man stretched out before her evoked in her mind another image no less terrible. I comforted her as best I could, but in reality I had little hope. We had to do with a case of complete paralysis of one side, and at eighty years of age few people recover from it. For three days the patient lay in the same state of inanition and stupor. Then the news of Reichshofen reached Paris. You remember in what a strange way it came. Up to the evening we all believed in a great victory, twenty thousand Prussians killed and the Prince Royal a prisoner. I know not by what miracle, what magnetic current, an echo of that national rejoicing sought out our poor deaf-mute in the depths of his paralysis; but the fact is that on that evening, when I approached his bed, I did not find the same man there. His eye was almost clear, his tongue less heavy. He had the strength to smile at me, and he stammered twice:

"'Vic-to-ry!'

"And as I gave him details of the grand exploit of MacMahon, I saw that his features relaxed and his face lighted up.

"When I left the room, the girl was waiting for me at the door, pale as death. She was sobbing.

"'But he is saved!' I said, taking her hands.

"The unhappy child hardly had the courage to reply. The true report of Reichshofen had been placarded; MacMahon in retreat, the whole army crushed. We gazed at each other in consternation. She was in despair, thinking of her father. I trembled, thinking of the old man. He certainly could not stand this fresh shock. And yet what were we to do. Leave him his joy, and the illusions which had revived him? But in that case we must lie.

"'Very well, I will lie!' said the heroic girl, quickly wiping away her tears; and with radiant face she entered her grandfather's chamber.

"It was a hard task that she had undertaken. The first few days she had no great difficulty. The good man's brain was feeble, and he allowed himself to be deceived like a child. But with returning health his ideas became clearer. We had to keep him posted concerning the movement of the armies, to draw up military bulletins for him. Really, it was pitiful to see that lovely child leaning night and day over her map of Germany, pinning little flags upon it, and struggling to lay out a glorious campaign: Bazaine besieging Berlin, Froissart in Bavaria, MacMahon on the Baltic. For all this she asked my advice, and I assisted her as well as I could; but it was the grandfather who was especially useful to us in that imaginary invasion. He had conquered Germany so many times under the First Empire! He knew all the strokes beforehand: 'Now this is where they will go. Now this is what they will do'; and his anticipations were always realised, which did not fail to make him very proud.

"Unluckily it was of no avail for us to take cities and win battles; we never went quickly enough for him. That old man was insatiable! Every day, when I arrived, I learned of some new military exploit.

"'Doctor, we have taken Mayence,' the girl would say to me, coming to meet me with a heart-broken smile, and I would hear through the door a joyous voice shouting to me:

"'They are getting on! They are getting on! In a week we shall be in Berlin!'

"At that moment the Prussians were only a week's march from Paris. We asked ourselves at first if it would be better to take him into the provinces; but as soon as we were outside the city, the state of the country would have told him everything, and I considered him still too weak, too much benumbed by his great shock, to let him know the truth. So we decided to remain.

"The first day of the investment of Paris, I went up to their rooms, I remember, deeply moved, with that agony at the heart which the closed gates, the fighting under the walls, and our suburbs turned into frontiers, gave us all. I found the good man seated on his bed, proud and jubilant.

"'Well,' he said, 'so the siege has begun!'

"I gazed at him in blank amazement.

"'What, Colonel! you know?'

"His grand-daughter turned towards me:

"'Why, yes, doctor, that's the great news. The siege of Berlin has begun.'

"As she said this, she plied her needle with such a sedate and placid air! How could he have suspected anything? He could not hear the guns of the forts. He could not see our unfortunate Paris, all in confusion and dreadful to behold. What he saw from his bed was a section of the Arc de Triomphe, and in his room, about him, a collection of bric-à-brac of the First Empire, well adapted to maintain his illusion. Portraits of marshals, engravings of battles, the King of Rome in a baby's dress, tall consoles adorned with copper trophies, laden with imperial relics, medals, bronzes, a miniature of St. Helena, under a globe, pictures representing the same lady all becurled, in a ball-dress of yellow, with leg-of-mutton sleeves and bright eyes;—and all these things: consoles, King of Rome, marshals, yellow ladies, with the high-necked, short-waisted dresses, the bestarched stiffness, which was the charm of 1806. Gallant colonel! It was that atmosphere of victories and conquests, even more than anything we could say to him, that made him believe so innocently in the siege of Berlin.

"From that day our military operations were much simplified. To take Berlin was only a matter of patience. From time to time, when the old man was too much bored, we would read him a letter from his son—an imaginary letter, of course, for nothing was allowed to enter Paris, and since Sedan MacMahon's aide-de-camp had been sent to a German fortress. You can imagine the despair of that poor child, without news from her father, knowing that he was a prisoner, in need of everything, perhaps sick, and she obliged to represent him as writing joyful letters, a little short, perhaps, but such as a soldier on the field might be expected to write, always marching forward through a conquered country. Sometimes her strength gave way; then they were without news for weeks. But the old man became anxious, could not sleep. Thereupon a letter from Germany would speedily arrive, which she would bring to his bedside and read joyously, forcing back her tears. The colonel would listen

religiously, smile with a knowing air, approve, criticise, and explain to us the passages that seemed a little confused. But where he was especially grand was in the replies that he sent to his son. 'Never forget that you are a Frenchman,' he would say to him. 'Be generous to those poor people. Don't make the invasion too hard for them.' And there were recommendations without end, admirable preachments upon respect for the proprieties, the courtesy which should be shown to the ladies, a complete code of military honour for the use of conquerors. He interspersed also some general considerations upon politics, the conditions of peace to be imposed upon the vanquished. Thereupon I must say that he was not exacting.

"'A war indemnity, and nothing more. What is the use of taking their provinces? Do you think it possible to turn Germany into France?'

"He dictated this in a firm voice; and one was conscious of such candour in his words, of such a noble, patriotic faith, that it was impossible not to be moved while listening to him.

"Meanwhile the siege went on—not the siege of Berlin, alas! It was the time of intense cold, of the bombardment, of epidemics and of famine. But, thanks to our care, to our efforts, to the unwearying affection which multiplied itself about him, the old man's serenity was not disturbed for an instant. To the very end I was able to obtain white bread and fresh meat for him. There was none for anybody but him, to be sure; and you can imagine nothing more touching than those breakfasts of the grandfather, so innocently selfish—the old man seated on his bed, fresh and smiling, with a napkin at his chin, and his granddaughter beside him, a little pale because of privations, guiding his hand, helping him to drink, and to eat all those forbidden good things. Then, enlivened by the repast, in the comfort of his warm room, the winter wind whistling outside, and the snow eddying about his windows, the ex-cuirassier would recall his campaigns in the north, and would describe to us for the hundredth time that terrible retreat from Russia, when they had nothing to eat but frozen biscuit and horse-flesh.

"'Do you understand that, my love? We had horse-flesh!'

"I rather think that she did understand it. For two months she had had nothing else. From that day, however, as the period of convalescence drew near, our task about the patient became more difficult. That numbness of all his senses, of all his members, which had served us so well hitherto, began to disappear. Two or three times, the terrible volleys from Porte Maillot had made him jump, with his ears pricked up like a hunting-dog; we were obliged to invent a final victory of Bazaine under the walls of Berlin, and guns fired in his honour at the Invalides. Another day when his bed had been moved to the window—it was, I believe, the Thursday of Buzenval—he saw large numbers of National Guards collected on Avenue de la Grande Armée.

"'What are all those troops?' asked the good man; and we heard him mutter between his teeth:

"'Poorly set up! Poorly set up!'

"That was all; but we understood that we must take great precautions thenceforth. Unluckily we did not take enough.

"One evening when I arrived, the girl came to me in great trouble.

"'They are to march into the city to-morrow,' she said.

"Was the grandfather's door open? In truth, on thinking it over afterwards, I remembered that his face wore an extraordinary expression that night. It is probable that he had overheard us. But we were talking of the Prussians; and the good man was thinking of the French, of that triumphal entry which he had been awaiting so long—MacMahon marching down the avenue amid flowers and flourishes of trumpets, his son beside him, and he, the old colonel, on his balcony, in full uniform as at Lutzen, saluting the torn flags and the eagles blackened by powder.

"Poor Father Jouve! He had imagined doubtless that we intended to prevent him from witnessing that parade of our troops, in order to avoid too great excitement. So he was very careful not to mention it to any one; but the next day, at the very hour when the Prussian battalions entered hesitatingly upon the long road which leads from Porte Maillot to the Tuileries, the window up there opened softly, and the colonel appeared on the balcony, with his helmet, his long sword, all the glorious old array of one of Milhaud's cuirassiers. I wonder still what effort of the will, what sudden outburst of life had placed him there upon his feet and in his harness. This

much is sure, that he was there, standing behind the rail, amazed to find the broad avenues so silent, the blinds of the houses closed, Paris as gloomy as a huge lazaretto, flags everywhere, but such strange flags, white with little crosses, and no one to go to meet our soldiers.

" For a moment he might have thought that he was mistaken.

" But no ! Yonder, behind the Arc de Triomphe, there was a confused rumbling, a black line approaching in the rising sunlight. Then, little by little, the points of the helmets gleamed, the little drums of Jena began to beat, and beneath the Arc de Triomphe, while the heavy tramp of the regiments and the clashing of the sabres beat time, Schubert's *Triumphal March* burst forth !

" Thereupon in the deathlike silence of the square, a cry rang out, a terrible cry : ' To arms ! To arms ! The Prussians ! ' and the four Uhlans of the vanguard saw up yonder, on the balcony, a tall old man wave his arms, stagger, and fall. That time, Colonel Jouve was really dead.

In The Eye of Nature

NATURE is not governed, except by obeying her. BACON.

AS I have grown older, the aspects of nature conducive to human life have become hourly more dear to me ; and I had now rather see a brown harvest field than the brightest Aurora Borealis. JOHN RUSKIN.

GIVE me health and a day, and I will make the pomp of emperors ridiculous. EMERSON.

TAKE away from our hearts the love of the beautiful and you take away the charm of life. ROUSSEAU.

I NEVER knew a naturalist who was not a good man. JOHN WILSON.

NATURE'S cult is, above all things, reasonable, and thus fulfils the condition of good working faith. Much is hidden ; much is lucid and practical. Mystery does not lack, for there are many holies where no boot has trodden. EDEN PHILLPOTTS.

YOU may drive out nature with a fork, but she will ever return. HORACE.

To disparage scenery as quite flat is, of course, like disparaging a swan as quite white, or an Italian sky as quite blue. G. K. CHESTERTON.

I BEGAN to think if there were no such place as London it really would be very desirable to live in the country. SIR A. HELPS.

WHEN one thinks of country houses and country walks, one wonders that any man is left unmarried. THACKERAY.

IT'S a warm wind, the west wind, full of birds' cries. J. MASEFIELD.

The Episode of Captain Barnacle

The humours of a very natural misunderstanding

By JOHN OXENHAM

THERE came the usual peremptory rat-tat on the front door, and Miss Charity, in her faded black silk and her most engaging smile, ran up the stairs to answer it. Her sisters, Miss Faith and Miss Hope, sat in the dark little parlour-kitchen, and followed the track of the adventure up above with straining ears and anxious hearts. For, you must know, it was the 4th of August, and not a single one of their rooms was let, and that was a serious matter.

There was the usual tentative colloquy on the front door step. Then—

"They've come in," said Miss Faith, and clasped her hands thankfully. "I had a feeling we should let to-day."

"Well, if they're nice people we'll hope they'll stop in," said Miss Hope, "but we mustn't be disappointed if they don't, Faith, dear. They don't always, you know, and sometimes when Charity has told us about them afterwards we've been very glad they didn't."

"I know. But I can't ever remember not having a single room let by the 4th of August, Hope. It's awful."

"We've always had somebody sooner or later, dear, and some of them have worried you two so that I've wished they'd never come."

"They've gone upstairs," said Miss Faith, listening intently, with a sparkle in her eyes. "I'm inclined to think it's all right. I wonder if they'll take all the rooms, and if they'll want late dinners. I wish Parliament would pass a law making it compulsory to dine at one o'clock. It's ever so much better for them than stuffing themselves with all kinds of things when it's almost bedtime. They must have the most horrible dreams, some of them, I'm sure. They're coming down again. They're in the dining-room. They're going out. H'm!—call again, I suppose, when they've tried to beat down somebody else with our prices. *Well, Charity,* dear—taken?"

"Not yet," said their younger sister, as she came down into the kitchen. "Look back presently."

"Or otherwise, as the case may be," said Miss Faith.

"But I don't know that they'd have suited us very well, Faith. She was an extensive person all over jet beads, and she has five children and a nurse and a parrot."

"A parrot?" cried her sisters.

"Whatever does she take a parrot about with her for?" asked Miss Faith, who got her breath first.

"It belonged to her husband, who is dead, and she says she looks upon it quite as one of the family, and it goes everywhere with them. It remembers him perfectly, and sometimes cries, 'George! George!' till she has to cover it up."

"I hope she won't come back," said Miss Hope. "It would be almost as bad as having a dead body in the house."

"It's the 4th of August," said Miss Faith, with a note of warning in her voice.

"A nurse is a good deal of a trial," said Miss Hope, "but a parrot *and* a nurse—"

"Perhaps somebody else will come before she gets back. There are lots of people prowling round," said Miss Charity.

"I wish some of the nice ones would prowl this way," said Miss Faith. "What I would like would be an elderly lady—a real lady—with three nice, quiet, grown-up daughters, and perhaps a grown-up son, if he's gentlemanly and doesn't smoke."

"If we could make our lodgers to order what very nice lodgers we'd have," said merry Miss Charity. She was young, not very much over forty, and a distant aroma of youth still clung to her like whiffs of the natural lavender, with stalks of which, with their crumbling heads neatly done up in little muslin nightcaps, she delighted to sprinkle her drawers and linen cupboard. She was the connecting link between her elder sisters and the outer world. For Miss

Faith did all the cooking and rarely went out during the season, and Miss Hope had been a hopeless invalid for more than twenty years—hopeless, however, only from the point of view of possible cure; in all other respects she was as full of the apostolic virtues as either of her sisters. Visitors rarely saw Miss Faith, and Miss Hope never. But Miss Charity, mingling with the gay and giddy throng above stairs, carried all the news below, and Miss Hope awaited her descents as impatiently as parted lovers or incipient authors await the postman; and Miss Charity never disappointed her. Every time she came down she brought a budget of news, or dashed off descriptive sketches of the nomads above which would have enabled those usually self-sufficient personages to correct many flaws in their characters if they could have listened to them.

The parlour-kitchen was half underground, and from the front window possessed an aggravating view of passing skirts and trouser legs. During the season it was the abode of a somewhat distressing complexity of odours which no amount of through draught ever entirely removed. And here Miss Hope lay on her couch, week in and week out, and assisted the busy workers in various ways, but chiefly by means of her head and her tongue and her unfailing good humour. When, now and then, Cook Faith entrusted her with some simple side issue in the culinary department, such as the chopping of parsley or the beating of eggs—something that she could do with her hands without moving her body—she was supremely happy for the rest of the day, and inclined to be a trifle puffed-up with conceit and the belief in a possible improvement in her incurable malady. Otherwise her time was spent in the concoction of worked tidies and the colouring of outline texts for the embellishment of the rooms upstairs.

They were the daughters of a Nonconformist country minister, who, on a stipend of £150 a year, had maintained his wife and family in a state of precarious happiness, and had clothed and educated the girls befittingly. How, Heaven and his wife only knew. What he did know was that after his wife died, when the youngest girl was about fifteen, he found it for some time harder to provide for four than it had been for five. But the girls were good girls, and soon learned how to manage the slender income. When that ended abruptly with their father's death they came into a windfall of close on £700 from his insurance money. How he had ever managed to pay the premiums passed their comprehension. But there was the money, and with it they took a small house at Sparburgh and started a school. For a time it succeeded fairly well, then dwindled in the face of growing competition, and at last they gave it up and decided to take in lodgers. They had their bad times and their not so bad times. Prosperity fought shy of the little grey house with the green venetian shutters, but, thanks to the money they had in the bank, they kept their heads above water and managed to present, if not a bold, at all events an equable front to the world. They lived, and looked to do little more, till the time should come for them to die.

And yet the little grey house and the little grey lives had not been entirely devoid of romance. Once upon a time a certain Colonel, late of the Indian army, retired from active service to energetic criticism, with a little money and a considerable temper, had taken the drawing-room upstairs and the bedroom adjoining, and had lived there all through the winter. In spite of his hot temper,—which showed itself chiefly in violent fulminations against certain powers in the East, against whom he cherished a perpetual grievance,—they grew to like him and he them, especially Miss Charity, who waited on him. He would probably have retained the drawing-room as a permanency if he had not caught a chill in the spring and died. He left each of the elder sisters £50, and £100 to Miss Charity—"in token of the affectionate esteem which her devoted attention has awakened in the heart of a sick and troublesome man."

"If the Colonel had lived"—became an accepted formula in the quaint little household. It was the dash of red in the grey of their lives, for the elder sisters held the profound conviction that if the Colonel had lived he would have married Charity—and incidentally themselves, of course, for they never would be parted—and the greyness would have been overlaid for ever with a covering of rose-pink and the Colonel's gold. It did them all good to think of that beautiful might-have-been, and helped them bravely through many a despondent hour. The Colonel's little legacy bolstered up their drooping fortunes for a time, but the thought of the high estate that had so barely

escaped them was infinitely more precious to them than the money.

They just managed to keep the ship afloat, and they lived in the constant hope of another Colonel turning up and completing the hope which the late one had roused in them.

They were, of course, too rigidly honest to prosper in their chosen walk in life. There was no landlady's cat at the little grey house, and Miss Hope's tiny black kitten, which lay perpetually in her lap and played with her wools and paint brushes, was too well cared for even to dream of attacking the lodger's stores, and moreover, it was always given away before it arrived at a stage of too great understanding, and was replaced by a replica of infantine innocence. Never until a scrap of cold rice-pudding had been sent upstairs at least three times, and been returned untouched, was it allowed to be converted, by means of a spoonful of milk and a dash of fresh nutmeg on top and five minutes on the stove, into a sumptuous supper for Miss Hope. The only fault Mrs. Briggs, the wife of the big butcher up at Burling, found with them was that they would persist in sending up scraps of previous meals to show by actual self-assertion that they were still intact.

"'Minds me," said Mrs. Briggs, "of when I was a girl and a bit difficult in my eating, and mother and me would have a fight now and again, and if I turned up my nose at a thing she would have it set before me at every meal until I ate it. I can't abide to see a bit of steak on the same dish with the roast mutton. It don't do to mix your meats like that, so, within reason, Miss Grayne, please understand that whatever is sent down is not to come up again." And when Miss Charity bore the glad tidings downstairs the others nearly whooped for joy, and they all lived in clover during the remainder of Mrs Briggs' stay, for she was a lady of size, both in person and ideas, and she believed as little in stinting herself as she did in mixing her meats.

However, to return. The lady of the parrot did not come back.

"And I'm really very glad she didn't," said Miss Hope, holding her work at arm's length for a bird's-eye view. It was the final tidy in a set of four, and was a somewhat wild departure from the usual run of her art. The set depicted, in red thread on white linen, four startling scenes in the life of a steeplechaser. No. 1. The Mount—jockey getting up on wrong side. Horse apparently paralysed at the innovation. No. 2. The Start—horse on its hind legs pawing frantically upwards, and begging heaven to witness its irresponsibility for anything that might happen to a man who didn't know the right side of a horse. No. 3. The Race—horse *ventre-à-terre* in the most literal fashion. Jockey's head twisted completely round regarding his unseen competitors with a self-satisfied smirk. No. 4. The Moral Ending—horse and rider come to inextricable grief over two lines of red thread representing a paling.

"Finished, Hope, dear?" asked Miss Charity.

"Finished at last," said Miss Hope. "You don't think they'll be considered too frivolously depraved, do you, Faith?"

"I don't think so, dear. We get all kinds of people, you know, and to some they might be attractive. And anyway, you make it all right in that last one. If that doesn't turn anyone against horse-racing I don't know what will."

"Yes, that contains the lesson. The first three might attract,"—I have seen those tidies, and I laugh still at the thought of them,—"but I think the last one would discourage anyone. I almost cried over it. That poor horse!"

"It is terrible!" said Miss Faith, regarding the tidy with a little shiver. It was.

"One gets tired of doing pigs and cows all the time. I simply had to have a change," said Miss Hope, by way of extenuation.

"I'll put them up in the drawing-room to-morrow," said Miss Charity. "Perhaps they'll bring us luck."

"Luck, Charity, dear! There is no such thing as luck," said Miss Hope.

"It's the 5th of August to-morrow," said Miss Faith, with a sigh.

"Well, I'll put them in the drawing-room all the same."

And it really seemed as though, in spite of Miss Faith, the depraved tidies did bring them luck.

There were several applicants for rooms next day, and they all promised to call again, but none of them did so.

"They were none of them quite our kind," said Miss Charity calmly.

"It's the 6th to-morrow," said Miss Faith. "I don't ever remember not having let a single room by the 6th before. It's

terrible. We shall be in the workhouse if things go on this way."

¶

IT was quite late in the afternoon when Miss Charity wreathed her face in its pleasantest smile, for the sixth time that day, and tripped up the stairs to an unusually loud knock on the door.

Those below heard the rumble of a big voice and the tread of heavy steps.

"It's come in, whatever it is," said Miss Faith.

"It sounds to me like an elephant," said Miss Hope. "Perhaps this one carries round her late husband's elephant and treats it as one of the family."

"Oh but, my dear, we couldn't do with an elephant about the house," said matter-of-fact Miss Faith. "One must draw the line somewhere."

The little house almost shook under the visitant. Presently the outer door closed, the heavy steps went past the window, and Miss Charity came down.

"Whatever was it, Charity?" asked Miss Faith. "It sounded as if it would bring the house down."

"Oh, he's not so bad as all that," said Miss Charity. "It's an old sea captain—Captain Barnacle. And if he likes it, it may be a permanency."

"What has he taken?" asked Miss Faith.

"Drawing-room and the bedroom next to it."

"The Colonel's rooms," murmured Miss Faith.

"He's gone up to the station for his traps," said Miss Charity, "and we're to have tea ready in half an hour. He's rather loud and heavy—"

"We thought he was an elephant," said Miss Hope.

"But I think he'll be very nice, and if he's a permanency, as he hinted, it will be a relief. Do you know, Hope, I believe it was your racing tidies that decided him to stop."

"Oh, I'm so glad," said Miss Hope, clasping her hands. "I was afraid they might turn people away. What did he say, Charity?"

"He looked at No. 4 for a long time first, then he looked all round till he found No. 1 and then Nos. 2 and 3. Then he looked at No. 4 again and said, 'Shiver my timbers! Did you do them, miss?' And I said no, it was my sister Hope did them. 'And what's your name, my dear?' he said. And I said it was Charity. And he said, 'And where's Faith?' And I said she's down in the kitchen. And he said, 'Well, my dear, I've been taking soundings all round, and I've found no spot I like quite so well as this, so if we can come to terms I'll just drop anchor here for a while, and if so be as the berth suits me I'll maybe lie up here all winter."

"That would be splendid if he turns out nice. He'll want to smoke, I suppose?"

"He may smoke all day and all night if he doesn't burn the house down," said Miss Charity.

"Yes," said Miss Faith, with a nod. "The day after to-morrow's the 7th. Now, if we could only let the other rooms we'd be all right after all."

Captain Barnacle's tea was ready for him when he returned with two big wooden sea chests on a cab. He helped the man to carry them up, and the two sisters below sat trembling lest the house should come down upon their heads. He had brought in some shrimps for his tea, and he sat a very long time over it. When Miss Charity went up, in answer to his ring, to remove the things, she hardly knew her own drawing-room, and stopped on the threshold with a little gasp of amazement.

"Don't be alarmed, my dear," trolled the Captain, in a big hearty voice. "I like to have my little things about me, then I feel at home. They've come from nigh every end o' the world. Queer stories some of 'em have too. Maybe I'll tell you about 'em some day. That spear might ha' gone through my heart, if it hadn't been for—"

"Oh, how terrible!" cried Miss Charity.

"Wuss if it had," said the Captain. "That's the revolver I always used to wear—"

"Not loaded," said Miss Charity faintly.

"Not loaded *now*," said the Captain, "'cause there ain't no occasion for it. You ain't likely to mutiny, my dear, and try and creep in on the old man while he's asleep—"

"Oh!" cried Miss Charity, with sense of shocked modesty.

"That's the time when a revolver comes in handy, my dear. That cutlass belonged to the captain of a Portugee slaver down Cameroons way. He died sudden. That's a

knobkerrie from Australia, and that curved thing's a boomerang. When you throw it, if you know the trick of it, it comes back at you as hard as you sent it."

"What a horrid thing!" said Miss Charity. "You haven't—any—live things, Captain, have you?" and she looked about fearfully at the shadows below the table and the sofa, in case anything in the shape of a snake or a young crocodile might be lurking there.

"No live things, miss—not here," said the Captain. "I keep them—I mean I don't hold with keeping live things in the house. I did have a live cobra once, a young one. But he died, so I stuffed him and gave him to a museum. Those are uncommonly fine s'rimps, miss. You and your sisters will do me a favour if you'll finish them, if so be as you favour them. Some folks does and some folks doesn't; for me I'm very fond of 'em when they're big and fat and fresh, and worth the trouble of pulling their heads and tails off."

"My dears," said Miss Charity, when she took the things into the kitchen, "those shrimps are for you, and you're to eat them all. You simply wouldn't know the drawing-room, Faith. He's got all kinds of things stuck about. Knoberangs and boomkerries from Australia, and spears that almost went through his heart, and revolvers that he shoots people with when they mutiny and try to steal on him when he's asleep—"

"Not loaded?" queried both sisters, with a gasp.

"No, he won't load them unless he sees signs of mutiny. And cutlasses and, oh—all kinds of awful things."

"No live things?" asked Miss Faith, with the same tremulous fear as Miss Charity had exhibited upstairs.

"No; his snake died, so he stuffed it and gave it to a museum."

"What an awful kind of a man!" said Miss Hope, laying down her work to stare at them.

"No, he's very nice, and I think he'll be very good company. He's going to tell me all about his things some time."

When she went up to light the lamp Captain Barnacle was sitting at the open window with a long pipe in his mouth, but he was not smoking.

"Ah, there you are, my dear," he said. "I was just wishing you'd come, but I didn't want to disturb you. Now I wonder what you'd say if I whispered 'Smoke.'" and his voice dropped on the word into a hoarse hurricane of a whisper like a rising gale in the chimney, which set Miss Charity laughing.

"I should say 'Smoke' too, Captain," she said.

And before she had finished, the match that had been wriggling in his fingers for nearly an hour flashed along his trouser leg and was buried in the bowl of his pipe.

"Smoke it is," said the Captain, with puffs of great content. "When one's accustomed to it, you see, one misses it, but when there's ladies in the question one likes to know their feelings."

The Captain was a voluminous smoker. In fact, there is good reason to believe that it was the sight of his cheerful red face and active funnel at the open window upstairs that frightened away a model old lady and two elderly daughters, who stood and looked at the house and then turned and went on their way. No one else saw them but the Captain. He drew in his head instantly, but the mischief was done and the rooms remained vacant.

Still he was a good lodger, gave very little trouble, and praised Miss Faith's cooking till she blushed as if she had been grilling a steak. He even asked to be introduced to the ladies downstairs.

"Seems kind of unnatural," he said, as he filled the little kitchen with his burly presence, "to be living in a house and never to have seen the people in it. Like having a passenger aboard ship and never setting eyes on him. And that happens sometimes, and it's always an uncomfortable thing. If a man's nothing to be ashamed of, let him show his face, says I; and if it's only seasickness, he'll get over it quicker outside his bunk than in it."

"It must be very delightful to travel all over the world," said Miss Hope, the sofa-bound. "How much you must have seen!"

"Well yes, miss. One can't help seeing a good deal if one goes about with one's eyes open," said the Captain half-apologetically.

"Can't help seeing?" echoed Miss Hope. "I shouldn't think anyone would want to help. I can't imagine anything more delightful than being able to go wherever you want and see everything there is to see."

"I don't know," said the Captain, with a half-shake of the head. "Sometimes

there's things one would just as soon forget. I remember once—" And he spun them a yarn which made their eyes grow round and large, and held their breath in suspense, and curdled their blood delightfully. He often spent an hour in the parlour-kitchen after that, and Miss Hope lived so adventurous a life in his company that she was quite tired out at times, and complained of pains in her limbs, which had had no exercise for twenty years.

¶

THE Captain cultivated a great acquaintance among the amphibious occupants of the row of little wooden huts along the top of the shingle ridge. They spent most of the time lounging on their arms over the great wooden capstans which were used to drag the boats up the shingle, talking to one another, or looking out over the sea with old binoculars or still more ancient telescopes for passing ships, or over the strip of Common behind for possible customers. To these honest, if not overoccupied, souls the Captain came as a godsend. He was never without a twist of strong tobacco, and he won the heart of Captain Billy Barlow, the coxswain of the Sparburgh lifeboat, with a present of an excellent cigar every day when they met. Within a week Captain Barnacle divided the honours of the beach with Captain Billy himself, and was as much an institution thereof as the oldest inhabitant of the original wooden hut whose roof consisted simply of an upturned boat.

That the Captain was in his element no one could possibly doubt who looked at his face as he lounged or sat among the ancient mariners and distributed twist and spun yarns equally to their liking. He dressed always in blue from necktie to stockings, and the comprehensive geniality of his smile was emphasised by the knowing backward tip of his wide grey billycock. He was the well-to-do retired seaman to the life.

"He's a good sort is Cap'n Barnacle," said Captain Billy Barlow, with emphatic finality, "a perfec' gentleman; and he have seed some mighty cur'ous things"; and so said everyone.

So very comfortable did the Captain find his quarters, both inside and outside, that he stayed on week after week, till the time ran into months, and it was evident that he had the makings of "a permanency" in him, and the sisters were well content.

Their other rooms, indeed, had not let at all well during the short season, but a permanent lodger all through the winter was a somewhat rare bird in Sparburgh, and so open-handed and genial a lodger as Captain Barnacle was absolutely unique.

Never in his life had the Captain been so much made of, never had he been so comfortable. It cannot be considered surprising that, having found so satisfactory a haven after all his wanderings, the idea of safeguarding it from the storms of life, so far as lay in his power, took root in his heart and grew and flourished there.

Miss Charity was a lady, of course, and he claimed to be no more than a rough sailor-man. But the cheerfulness and hopefulness—in a word, the Faith, Hope, and Charity—of the three sisters had curled round his heart, and he knew that he could never be so happy again anywhere else in the world.

Miss Charity faithfully reported all his sayings and doings downstairs, just as she used to do the Colonel's, and the dark little parlour grew luminous with unspoken hopes and ideas. The gentle lamentations for the Colonel grew fewer and further between. Military reminiscences faded before more present maritime experiences. For, by degreees, they all grew very fond of Captain Barnacle; and, after all, one live captain counts for more in the matter of personal friendship than a whole regiment of dead colonels. The greatest fear of their lives was that he would grow tired of his quarters and leave them—perhaps go to sea again and get drowned. How he had ever come through so many hair-breadth escapes was almost beyond belief. If he hadn't sat there in very solid person telling them the stories they would hardly have believed it possible.

"I do hope he won't die," said Miss Hope plaintively.

"Die? Why should he die? He is as strong and well and hearty as he possibly could be," said Miss Charity.

"Well, the Colonel died just when—"

"He's not been eating as well as he used to," said Miss Faith. "I hope he's not getting tired of my things. I'll look up some new dishes for him."

By degrees, and in course of time, the Captain grew palpably mopey in his manner, as of one with dyspepsia or a conscience.

Even the longshoremen noticed it, and did their best to cheer him. With the best of intentions, and an eye to business, they urged him to go sailing, and did their best to wheedle him out fishing. But to all their disinterested blandishments he answered, "Nay, lads, if you'd spent forty years at sea you'd be ready to keep the feel of dry land under your feet when the chance came. It's a hard life at best," and his head would wag reminiscently.

They were greatly concerned for him, for they liked himself and his yarns and his twist, and they did not want to lose any of these most desirable alleviations of their lot They discussed his condition among themselves, and ventured many opinions. The prevalent one was that he was not comfortable in his lodgings.

"They're good wimmen, be the Miss Graynes, but maybe they're a bit straight-laced for th' old gen'leman. Passon's daughters I've heard say," said the spokesman at one of the capstan meetings. "He do smoke indoors. Yes, I've seed 'im. But maybe 'e don't feel free to grog and cuss a bit as comes nat'ral to a man what's bin at sea all his life. An' when a man's cut off too sudden from doin' the things what's nat'ral to 'im to do, why nat'rally he feels it," and just then the Captain came across the Common and churned through the shingle, and the sympathetic mariner determined to tackle him at once.

"Better, Cap'n?" he asked.

"I'm all right, Jim. What's wrong with you?"

"How's yer diggings, Cap'n?" And the rest listened open-mouthed.

"My diggings, Jim? They're all right—best I ever had. What's started you on this tack, my lad?"

"Well, Cap'n, we thought maybe they wasn't quite big enough for you, and if so be's we could make you any comformabler, why we'd like t' do it. You ain't look'n' as chirpy as y' used to, Cap'n, an' that's a fact, an' if th's anything we can do—"

"I'm all right, lads, right as a trivet. Never was more comfortable in my life, and I've no intention of leaving Sparburgh, none at all. In fact"—he said slowly—"I shouldn't be a bit surprised if I was to settle down here for the rest of my life."

"That'll suit us down to the ground, Cap'n. There's not a man of us but'd be sorry if you was to go, whether it was up or down or any which way. Right here on Sparburgh beach is the place we wants you."

"Thank 'ee, my lads," said the Captain. "That's a nice little house in the trees yonder, back of the hedge. Who does it belong to?"

"Nicest little house in all Sparburgh," said Jim. "Reg'ler nest for a 'tired sea-captain, with a bit of turf in front as smooth as a quarter-deck and a ship's mast in the middle just t' make 'im feel at 'ome. It b'longs to Chivings the lawyer. He's dead, and his nevvy what got all the prop'ty he's a-making ducks and drakes of it up in Lunnon. Improvin' prop'ty, too," said Jim, with a knowing nod "You sneck it, Cap'n, 'fore someone else comes along an' raises the price."

"I'll go and have another look at it," said the Captain. "How's Captain Barlow to-day?"

"His rhumatiz is very bad an' so's 'is temper. Can't move and won't lie still and cussin' don't 'elp him one bit."

"I'll drop in and see him as I come back," and the Captain went along to hang over the green gate of Rose Cottage, as he had already hung there many times before, dreaming dreams and heaving sighs.

"That's it, lads; he's finding th' Miss Graynes a bit narrer, an' he's wantin' wider quarters. An' quite right too. How'd you expect a passel o' passon's daughters t'understand right a man what's bin all 'is life at sea? 'Tain't to be expected."

Then there came one dark night of revelation in the winter, when the wind howled round the little grey house and bellowed in the chimneys, and the mighty waves thundered up the beach till *terra firma* was firm no longer but shuddered beneath the fierce blows, and the back-rushing surge on the shingle was like the roar of a stone slide in the Alps. Through the tumult of the storm came the quick, impatient clang of the lifeboat bell, agonised heart-beats ringing through a metal tongue, drawing men with an appeal that none might resist.

Captain Barnacle clapped on his big grey hat, slammed the front door, and ran with the rest.

"He's gone!" said Miss Faith, with clasped hands.

"Of course," said Miss Charity. "He's a man and a sailor."

"I hope he'll not get into any danger," said Miss Hope.

And after a time Miss Charity got up restlessly and said, "I—I—think I'll just run down and see what's happening, girls;" and she threw a thick shawl round her head, and slammed the front door, and bent and ran.

¶

THE crew was formed before the Captain got there, but Jim Thoroway, second cox—for Captain Billy Barlow was still down with the rheumatism—spied him at once and called out, "Come and take charge of her, Cap'n?"

"Not me, lad. You're better up to it than I am."

"You'll come, Cap'n?" cried half a dozen voices.

"Ay, ay, lads, I'll come," and almost before he knew it he was inside a cork jacket and minus his hat, which blew away as he topped the side, and found himself sitting on a grating between Jim and another who stood holding the steering ropes.

He saw a rocket cut a fiery curve in the sky to windward, and above his head the sails hummed like drums. The boat, big as it looked ashore, kicked and reared and shuddered and pitched to and fro like a cork. The air was full of roaring confusion. Captain Barnacle felt more uncomfortable than ever he had felt before in all his adventurous life. He felt sick and dizzy. His skin was all a-bristle, his eyes strained wildly and seemed like to fall out of his head, his hair was plastered down on his forehead with perspiration and salt sea spray. A great fear possessed him that he was going to disgrace himself by being sea-sick.

Suddenly Thoroway stooped to his ear and bellowed, "Shall we work in under—or beat—wind'ard—drop down?"

"Get in quick," shouted the Captain, since getting in quick tended to getting back quick and the salvation of his sailorly honour.

Then of a sudden he caught sight of the ship they were making for, and after that he had no more thought for himself. She was lying on a hidden bank of sand, almost on her beam ends, and the seas on the other side were thrashing over her with the noise of thunder and the white-fanged venom of hungry wolves. She was breaking up rapidly. The crew had succeeded in lighting a blue flare under the break of the poop, and by its ghastly light their desperate situation was made plainly visible. Captain Barnacle saw and never forgot. The sight drove him frantic. He sprang up and danced wildly about. He tossed his arms and shouted incoherent exhortations to the men in the boat and the men on the wreck.

"Get 'em off, lads! Get 'em! Every man of 'em. We must have 'em every one. Hold on there! We're coming—"

Then the plunging lug of the lifeboat came down with a run, as they ran in under the lee of the wreck. And as the sail came down, the mizzen-yard caught Captain Barnacle full on the crown of his head and ended his doings for that night.

When he came to he was in his own bed, though it took him some time to find that out. For it seemed to him that the storm was still roaring and the sails still drumming just above him, as he had heard them in the boat. But it was his own head, all nicely stitched and bandaged up, that was humming, and the big storm had travelled half across the globe before his wits were quite his own again.

"Have we got 'em?" were his first words, and when Miss Charity gently reassured him on that point he went to sleep again.

She had met the heavy footsteps at the door with foreboding at her heart.

"Is he dead?" she gasped, as the shining oilskins carried him in.

"No, miss, on'y got his 'ead broke. Doctor'll be here in a minute t' see t' 'im. He got excited about the wreck, and the mizzen-yard 'it 'im on the 'ead as it came down. We'd best carry 'im right up to's bed."

"Oh, please do," said Miss Charity and Miss Faith, fluttering round like a pair of troubled hens. And when the doctor came in he said it was a nasty knock, and there was probably slight concussion of the brain. He did what was necessary, and assured the anxious ladies that all that was needed was quiet, and careful nursing, and that the Captain was a fortunate man to be in such good hands.

It was some days before the Captain was out on the front again. Jim Thoroway came up at once and thanked him heartily for his advice in connection with the wreck.

"Them men owes their lives to you, Cap'n Barnacle," said Jim. "I was in

two minds which was best thing to do—to work in under 'em or beat up to wind'ard and drop down on the cable. Then you ups and says, 'Get in quick'; and you was right, Cap'n, for she broke up as we got th' last man off, and if we'd wasted time beating up to wind'ard we wouldn't ha' got one of them."

The Captain was mightily pleased at this; and when he insisted on doubling each man's pay for that night's work, all alongshore was mightily pleased as well.

The winter months were a dead and dreary time as a rule in Sparburgh, but this winter was an exception, in the little grey house at all events. For the Captain's cheerful presence and endless fund of personal reminiscence enlivened it to such an extent that the three Miss Graynes hardly knew either the little grey house or their little grey selves. Compared with him, the Colonel had been nothing but a troublesome humour, clothed in frail human flesh and many grievances. Captain Barnacle had not apparently a grievance in the world. He found life very pleasant, and took the greatest delight in making other people happy, whether it was by distributing pennies to the longshore children on the front, or twist to the longshoremen themselves, or an occasional packet of tea to the longshore women who lived in the little cottages which the newer houses had elbowed out of sight.

It would have been very remarkable, of course, and might have given rise to rumours of discontent on his part, which he was very far from feeling, if his benefactions had not extended to his landladies. But he loaded them with kindnesses to such an extent that the two elder sisters became quite convinced in their own minds that he had got his eye on "dear Charity," and that that giddy child was to be vouchsafed another chance of happiness. They discussed the matter when she was not there, and exchanged many a knowing look as she told them of the Captain's latest sayings and doings upstairs.

The present of a paper bag of crisp pink shrimps was looked upon by them as in the nature of a billet-doux. A brilliant lobster, hot from the pot, they considered as within measurable distance of a declaration of love. When spring arrived, and Charity came down now and again with radiant bunches of flowers, which brought something of the brightness and fragrance of life into the little kitchen-parlour and set six soft eyes sparkling mistily—not so much at the flowers themselves as at the friendliness which had sent them; for to the lonely the thoughtfulness of a friend is a foretaste of heaven—then Miss Faith and Miss Hope only waited from day to day for an official announcement from above.

"Ur-r-rh! a-herr-r-rh!" said Captain Barnacle, clearing his throat one evening as Miss Charity was taking away his tea things. "Er—do you know a little house on the front called Rose Cottage, Miss Charity? It's got green shutters and a green gate and a flagstaff on the lawn."

"Yes, I know it, Captain. It's a pretty little house. It used to belong to Mr Chivings the lawyer."

"That's it. Pretty little house, isn't it?"—he was slowly ramming tobacco into his pipe, and his eyes were fixed upon her in a gaze compounded of resolute purpose and shrinking timidity. "I've just bought it, Miss Charity."

"Oh—!" and Miss Charity set down the tray with a startled look and a flicker of colour in her cheeks. "I—I'm sorry. We shall miss you, Captain," she said, with a poor attempt at a cheerful smile.

"Not unless you say so, Miss Charity," said the Captain boldly.

"Why—how?—" replied Miss Charity.

"If—if you'll come and take charge of it, Miss Charity, you'll make me a very happy man. I've never been married, and I've never met anyone I wanted for a wife so much as I want you"—so far bravely and well,—"but—but"—and the bold mariner floundered badly, and went first red, then white, and finally settled into the motley of extreme distress. He touched bottom and gave a spasmodic kick upwards again like a drowning man.

"Before I can rightly ask you," he said stolidly, "I've got to tell you something you ought to know. I'm not what you think I am—"

"Oh, Captain Barnacle!" gasped Miss Charity.

"No, I'm not Captain Barnacle. That's only a *nom-de*—what d'ye call it? I'm a fraud."

"Oh, Captain Barn—!" and poor Miss Charity's hands clasped nervously, and her innocent thoughts flew to piracy, murder, and sudden death, and suchlike things. "You're not—" But she could not say it.

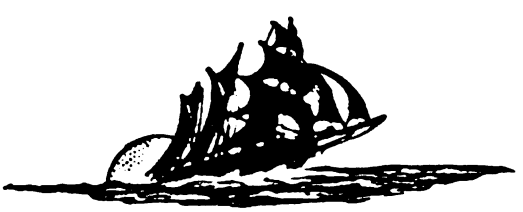
"I'm nothing dreadful," he said. "I've

lived honest all my life, Miss Charity, until I came to Sparburgh, and then—well, it was this way, you see. Won't you please sit down, for I've got to go through with it now? I'd always wanted to be a sailor, you see, since the time I was so high. My grandfather was a sailor and my uncle was a sailor. But my father wouldn't have it. He knew too much about it. He set up in business, and got on a bit, and he nailed me down to it too. I'm not saying but that it's been better for me from some points of view. A sailorman don't make any too much money these days. And I've made money. But all the same it was not the life I'd have lived if it had been left to myself, and I've always missed the other. The business was mixed up with the sailoring, or maybe I'd have chucked it and gone. However, I stuck to it, because I had to at first, and then, when my father died, because I wanted to make money enough to be able to quit it. I sold it last year for £25,000 to a company, and then, for the first time in my life, I was free to be a sailor. I was too old, of course, to be a real one, so I became a—er—well—I became Captain Barnacle, and I'm bound to say I've enjoyed myself more these last eight months than ever I did before in all my life put together, and "—very slowly and emphatically—" the time I've spent in this house has been the best of all. If you can forgive me, Miss Charity, for—for it all, I'd make you a good husband. I'm only fifty-eight. My real name's Ezra Seam, Ship-store Dealer, Wapping, and Ezra Seam's stores have as good a name as any in the trade and better than most. No sailorman ever had his stomach turned with anything that passed through my hands, I warrant you. If you—will you?"—and he stretched out a big brown hand to her.

And Miss Charity, looking into his honest blue eyes, understood him fully, and loved him none the less for his simple assumption of a more heroic rôle than life had allotted to him. Her eyes were soft and bright as she put her hand into his, and said, "You will always be Captain Barnacle to me, and I wouldn't have you anything else, Captain."

They kept their secret from all the world and went up to London to be married.

Rose Cottage is the jolliest little house in Sparburgh. Captain Barnacle is still an institution on the front and the delight of the longshoremen, who still tell how it was his quick insight and decision that saved the lives of the ten men on the brig *Mary Brown* when she was breaking up on the sands. If you doubt my story you can read that corroboration of it at all events painted up on the tablets in Sparburgh lifeboat house. And how came I to know all about it? Ah, now, that would be telling!



¶ A LONG, complete romance by HORACE ANNESLEY VACHELL, entitled "The Soul of the Guitar," is a prominent feature in the APRIL issue, now on sale, of *CASSELL'S MAGAZINE*, price 1s.

¶ THE latest story concerning George H. Jay, perhaps the most entertaining character BERTRAM ATKEY has yet created, appears in the same number. Its title is "George H. Jay and the Bourke Oil-Bean."

¶ OTHER contributors to the issue are ROBERT W. CHAMBERS, T. P. O'CONNOR, HERMAN DAREWSKI, VINGIE E. ROE, FRANK. H. SHAW, etc.

Brown Wolf

Of a lost dog and how he found the trail

By JACK LONDON

SHE had delayed, because of the dew-wet grass, in order to put on her overshoes, and when she emerged from the house found her waiting husband absorbed in the wonder of a bursting almond-bud. She sent a questing glance across the tall grass and in and out among the orchard trees.

"Where's Wolf?" she asked.

"He was here a moment ago." Walt Irvine drew himself away with a jerk from the metaphysics and poetry of the organic miracle of blossom, and surveyed the landscape. "He was running a rabbit the last I saw of him."

"Wolf! Wolf! Here, Wolf!" she called, as they left the clearing and took the trail that led down through the waxen-belled manzanita jungle to the county road.

Irvine thrust between his lips the little finger of each hand and lent to her efforts a shrill whistling.

She covered her ears hastily and made a wry grimace.

"My, for a poet, delicately attuned and all the rest of it, you can make unlovely noises! My ear-drums are pierced. You outwhistle——"

"Orpheus."

"I was about to say a street-arab," she concluded severely.

"Poesy does not prevent one from being practical—at least it doesn't prevent *me*. Mine is no futility of genius that can't sell gems to the magazines."

He assumed a mock extravagance, and went on:

"I am no attic singer, no ballroom warbler. And why? Because I am practical. Mine is no squalor of song that cannot transmute itself, with proper exchange value, into a flower-crowned cottage, a sweet mountain meadow, a grove of redwoods, an orchard of thirty-seven trees, one long row of blackberries and two short rows of strawberries, to say nothing of a quarter of a mile of gurgling brook. I am a beauty merchant, a trader in song, and I pursue utility, dear Madge. I sing a song and thanks to the magazine editors, I transmute my song into a waft of the west wind sighing through our redwoods, into a murmur of waters over mossy stones that sings back to me another song than the one I sang and yet the same song wonderfully—er—transmuted."

"Oh that your all song transmutations were as successful!" she laughed.

"Name one that wasn't."

"Those two beautiful sonnets that you transmuted into the cow that was accounted the worst milker in the township."

"She was beautiful——" he began.

"But she didn't give milk," Madge interrupted.

"But she *was* beautiful, now, wasn't she?" he insisted.

"And here's where beauty and utility fall out," was her reply. "And there's the Wolf!"

From the thicket-covered hillside came a crashing of underbrush, and then, forty feet above them, on the edge of the sheer wall of rock, appeared a wolf's head and shoulders. His braced fore-paws dislodged a pebble, and with sharp-pricked ears and peering eyes he watched the fall of the pebble till it struck at their feet. Then he transferred his gaze and with open mouth laughed down at them.

"You, Wolf, you!" and "You blessed Wolf!" the man and woman called out to him.

The ears flattened back and down at the sound, and the head seemed to snuggle under the caress of an invisible hand.

They watched him scramble backward into the thicket, then proceeded on their way. Several minutes later, rounding a turn in the trail where the descent was less precipitous, he joined them in the midst of a miniature avalanche of pebbles and loose soil. He was not demonstrative. A pat and a rub around the ears from the man, and

a more prolonged caressing from the woman, and he was away down the trail in front of them, gliding effortlessly over the ground in true wolf fashion.

In build and coat and brush he was a huge timber wolf; but the lie was given to his wolf-hood by his colour and marking. There the dog unmistakably advertised itself. No wolf was ever coloured like him. He was brown, deep-brown, red-brown, an orgy of browns. Back and shoulders were a warm brown that paled on the sides and underneath to a yellow that was dingy because of the brown that lingered in it. The white of the throat and paws and the spots over the eyes was dirty, because of the persistent and ineradicable brown, while the eyes themselves were twin topazes, golden and brown.

The man and woman loved the dog very much; perhaps this was because it had been such a task to win his love. It had been no easy matter when he first drifted in mysteriously out of nowhere to their little mountain cottage. Footsore and famished, he had killed a rabbit under their very noses and under their very windows, and then crawled away and slept by the spring at the foot of the blackberry bushes. When Walt Irvine went down to inspect the intruder, he was snarled at for his pains, and Madge likewise was snarled at when she went down to present, as a peace-offering, a large pan of bread-and-milk.

A most unsociable dog he proved to be, resenting all their advances, refusing to let them lay hands on him, menacing them with bared fangs and bristling hair. Nevertheless he remained, sleeping and resting by the spring, and eating the food they gave him after they set it down at a safe distance and retreated. His wretched physical condition explained why he lingered; and when he had recuperated, after several days' sojourn, he disappeared.

And this would have been the end of him, so far as Irvine and his wife were concerned, had not Irvine at that particular time been called away into the northern part of the state. Riding along on the train, near to the line between California and Oregon, he chanced to look out of the window and saw his unsociable guest sliding along the wagon road, brown and wolfish, tired yet tireless, dust-covered and soiled with two hundred miles of travel.

Now Irvine was a man of impulse, a poet. He got off the train at the next station, bought a piece of meat at a butcher's shop, and captured the vagrant on the outskirts of the town. The return trip was made in the baggage car, and so Wolf came a second time to the mountain cottage. Here he was tied up for a week and made love to by the man and woman. But it was a very circumspect love-making. Remote and alien as a traveller from another planet, he snarled down their soft-spoken love-words. He never barked. In all the time they had him he was never known to bark.

To win him became a problem. Irvine liked problems. He had a metal plate made, on which was stamped:

Return to Walt Irvine,

Glen Ellen, Sonoma County, California.

This was riveted to the collar and strapped about the dog's neck. Then he was turned loose, and promptly he disappeared. A day later came a telegram from Mendocino County. In twenty hours he had made over a hundred miles to the north.

He came back by Wells Fargo Express, was tied up three days, and was loosed on the fourth and lost. This time he gained southern Oregon before he was caught and returned. Always, as soon as he received his liberty, he fled away, and always he fled north. He was possessed of an obsession that drove him north. The homing instinct, Irvine called it, after he had expended the price of a sonnet in getting the animal back from northern Oregon.

¶

ANOTHER time the brown wanderer succeeded in traversing half the length of California, all of Oregon and most of Washington, before he was picked up and returned "Collect." A remarkable thing was the speed with which he travelled. Fed up and rested, as soon as he was loosed he devoted all his energy to getting over the ground. On the first day's run he was known to cover as many as a hundred and fifty miles, and after that he would average a hundred miles a day until caught. He always arrived back lean and hungry and savage, and always departed fresh and vigorous, cleaving his way northward in response to some prompting of his being that no one could understand.

But at last, after a futile year of flight, he accepted the inevitable and elected to remain at the cottage where first he had killed the rabbit and slept by the spring.

Even after that, a long time elapsed before the man and woman succeeded in patting him. It was a great victory, for they alone were allowed to put hands on him. He was fastidiously exclusive, and no guest at the cottage ever succeeded in making up to him. A low growl greeted such approach ; if any one had the hardihood to come nearer, the lips lifted, the naked fangs appeared, and the growl became a snarl—a snarl so terrible and malignant that it awed the stoutest of them as it likewise awed the farmers' dogs that knew ordinary dog-snarling, but had never seen wolf-snarling before.

He was without antecedents. His history began with Walt and Madge. He had come up from the south, but never a clue did they get of the owner from whom he had evidently fled. Mrs. Johnson, their nearest neighbour, and the one who supplied them with milk, proclaimed him a Klondike dog. Her brother was burrowing for frozen pay-streaks in that far country, and so she constituted herself an authority on the subject.

But they did not dispute her. There were the tips of Wolf's ears, obviously so severely frozen at some time that they would never quite heal again. Besides, he looked like the photographs of the Alaskan dogs they saw published in magazines and newspapers. They often speculated over his past, and tried to conjure up (from what they had read and heard) what his northland life had been. That the northland still drew him, they knew ; for at night they sometimes heard him crying softly ; and when the north wind blew and the bite of frost was in the air, a great restlessness would come upon him and he would lift a mournful lament which they knew to be the long wolf-howl. Yet he never barked. No provocation was great enough to draw from him that canine cry.

Long discussion they had, during the time of winning him, as to whose dog he was. Each claimed him, and each proclaimed loudly any expression of affection made by him. But the man had the better of it at first, chiefly because he was a man. It was patent that Wolf had had no experience with women. He did not understand women. Madge's skirts were something he never quite accepted. The swish of them was enough to set him a-bristle with suspicion, and on a windy day she could not approach him at all.

On the other hand, it was Madge who fed him ; also it was she who ruled the kitchen, and it was by her favour, and her favour alone, that he was permitted to come within that sacred precinct. It was because of these things that she bade fair to overcome the handicap of her garments. Then it was that Walt put forth special effort, making it a practice to have Wolf lie at his feet while he wrote, and, between petting and talking, losing much time from his work. Walt won in the end, and his victory was most probably due to the fact that he was a man, though Madge averred that they would have had another quarter of a mile of gurgling brook, and at least two west winds sighing through their redwoods, had Walt properly devoted his energies to song-transmutation and left Wolf alone to exercise a natural taste and an unbiassed judgment.

" It's about time I heard from those triolets," Walt said, after a silence of five minutes, during which they had swung steadily down the trail. " There'll be a cheque at the post office, I know, and we'll transmute it into beautiful buckwheat flour, a gallon of maple syrup, and a new pair of overshoes for you."

"And into beautiful milk from Mrs. Johnson's beautiful cow," Madge added. " To-morrow's the first of the month, you know."

Walt scowled unconsciously, then his face brightened, and he clapped his hand to his breast pocket.

" Never mind. I have here a nice beautiful new cow, the best milker in California."

" When did you write it ? " she demanded eagerly. Then, reproachfully, "And you never showed it to me."

" I saved it to read to you on the way to the post-office, in a spot remarkably like this one," he answered, indicating, with a wave of his hand, a dry log on which to sit.

A tiny stream flowed out of a dense fern brake, slipped down a mossy-lipped stone, and ran across the path at their feet. From the valley arose the mellow song of meadow larks, while about them, in and out, through sunshine and shadow, fluttered great yellow butterflies.

Up from below came another sound that broke in upon Walt reading softly from his manuscript. It was the crunching of heavy feet, punctuated now and again by the clattering of a displaced stone. As Walt finished and looked to his wife for approval, a man came into view around the turn of

the trail. He was bare-headed and sweaty. With a handkerchief in one hand he mopped his face, while in the other hand he carried a new hat and a wilted starched collar, which he had removed from his neck. He was a well-built man, and his muscles seemed on the point of bursting out of the painfully-new and ready-made black clothes he wore.

"Warm day," Walt greeted him. Walt believed in country democracy, and never missed an opportunity to practise it.

The man paused and nodded.

"I guess I ain't used much to the warm," he vouchsafed half-apologetically. "I'm more accustomed to zero weather."

"You don't find any of that in this country," Walt laughed.

"Should say not," the man answered. "An' I ain't here a-lookin' for it, neither. I'm tryin' to find my sister. Mebbe you know where she lives. Her name's Johnson, Mrs. William Johnson."

"You're not her Klondike brother!" Madge cried, her eyes bright with interest, "about whom we've heard so much?"

"Yes'm, that's me," he answered modestly. "My name's Miller, Skiff Miller. I just thought I'd s'prise her."

"You are on the right track, then. Only you've come by the footpath." Madge stood up to direct him, pointing up the cañon a quarter of a mile. "You see that blasted redwood? Take the little trail turning off to the right. It's the short cut to her house. You can't miss it."

"Yes'm, thank you, ma'am," he said.

He made tentative efforts to go, but seemed awkwardly rooted to the spot. He was gazing at her with an open admiration of which he was quite unconscious, and which was drowning, along with him, in the rising sea of embarrassment in which he floundered.

"We'd like to hear you tell about the Klondike," Madge said. "Mayn't we come over some day while you are at your sister's? Or, better yet, won't you come over and have dinner with us?"

"Yes'm, thank you, ma'am," he mumbled mechanically. Then he caught himself up and added: "I ain't stoppin' long. I got to be pulling north again. I go out on to-night's train. You see, I've got a mail contract with the Government."

When Madge had said it was too bad, he made another futile effort to go. But he could not take his eyes from her face. He forgot his embarrassment in his admiration, and it was her turn to flush and feel uncomfortable.

It was at this juncture, when Walt had just decided it was time for him to be saying something to relieve the strain, that Wolf, who had been away nosing through the brush, trotted wolf-like into view.

Skiff Miller's abstraction disappeared. The pretty woman before him passed out of his field of vision. He had eyes only for the dog, and a great wonder came into his face.

"Well, I'll be damned!" he enunciated slowly and solemnly.

¶

HE sat down ponderingly on the log, leaving Madge standing. At the sound of his voice, Wolf's ears had flattened down, then his mouth had opened in a laugh. He trotted slowly up to the stranger and first smelled his hands, then licked them.

Skiff Miller patted the dog's head, and slowly and solemnly repeated, "Well, I'll be damned!"

"Excuse me, ma'am," he said the next moment, "I was just s'prised some, that was all."

"We're surprised, too," she answered lightly. "We never saw Wolf make up to a stranger before."

"Is that what you call him—Wolf?"

Madge nodded. "But I can't understand his friendliness towards you—unless it's because you're from Klondike. He's a Klondike dog, you know."

"Yes'm," Miller said absently. He lifted one of Wolf's fore-legs and examined the footpads, pressing them and denting them with his thumb. "Kind of soft," he remarked. "He ain't been on trail for a long time."

"I say," Walt broke in, "it is remarkable the way he lets you handle him."

Skiff Miller arose, no longer awkward with admiration of Madge, and in a sharp, business-like manner asked, "How long have you had him?"

But just then the dog, squirming and rubbing against the newcomer's legs, opened his mouth and barked. It was an explosive bark, brief and joyous, but a bark.

"That's a new one on me," Skiff Miller remarked.

Walt and Madge stared at each other. The miracle had happened. Wolf had barked.

" It's the first time he ever barked," Madge said.

" First time I ever heard him, too," Miller volunteered.

Madge smiled at him. The man was evidently a humorist.

" Of course," she said, " since you have only seen him for five minutes."

Skiff Miller looked at her sharply, seeking in her face the guile her words had led him to suspect.

" I thought you understood," he said slowly. " I thought you'd tumbled to it from his makin' up to me. He's my dog. His name ain't Wolf. It's Brown."

" Oh, Walt ! " was Madge's instinctive cry to her husband.

Walt was on the defensive at once.

" How do you know he's your dog ? " he demanded.

" Because he is," was the reply.

" Mere assertion," Walt said sharply.

In his slow and pondering way, Skiff Miller looked at him, then asked, with a nod of his head toward Madge :

" How d'you know she's your wife ? You just say, ' Because she is,' and I'll say it's mere assertion. The dog's mine. I bred 'm an' raised 'm, an' I guess I ought to know. Look here. I'll prove it to you."

Skiff Miller turned to the dog. " Brown ! " His voice rang out sharply, and at the sound the dog's ears flattened down as to a caress. " Gee ! " The dog made a swinging turn to the right. " Now mush on ! " And the dog ceased his swing abruptly and started straight ahead, halting obediently at command.

" I can do it with whistles," Skiff Miller said proudly. " He was my lead dog."

" But you are not going to take him away with you ? " Madge asked tremulously.

The man nodded.

" Back into that awful Klondike world of suffering ? "

He nodded and added, " Oh, it ain't so bad as all that. Look at me Pretty healthy specimen, ain't I ? "

" But the dogs ! The terrible hardship, the heart-breaking toil, the starvation, the frost ! Oh, I've read about it, and I know."

" I nearly ate him once, over on Little Fish River," Miller volunteered grimly. " If I hadn't got a moose that day—that was all that saved 'm."

" I'd have died first ! " Madge cried.

" Things is different down here," Miller explained. " You don't have to eat dogs. You think different just about the time you're all in. You've never ben all in, so you don't know anything about it "

" That's the very point," she argued warmly. " Dogs are not eaten in California. Why not leave him here ? He is happy. He'll never want for food—you know that. He'll never suffer from cold and hardship. Here all is softness and gentleness. Neither the human nor nature is savage. He will never know a whip-lash again. And as for the weather—why, it never snows here."

" But it's all-fired hot in summer, beggin' your pardon," Skiff Miller laughed.

" But you do not answer," Madge continued passionately. " What have you to offer him in that northland life ? "

" Grub, when I've got it, and that's most of the time." came the answer.

"And the rest of the time ? "

" No grub."

"And the work ? "

" Yes, plenty of work," Miller blurted out impatiently. " Work without end, an' famine, an' frost, an' all the rest of the miseries—that's what he'll get when he comes with me. But he likes it. He is used to it. He knows that life. He was born to it an' brought up to it. An' you don't know anything about it. You don't know what you're talking about. That's where the dog belongs, and that's where he'll be happiest."

" The dog doesn't go," Walt announced in a determined voice. " So there is no need of further discussion."

" What's that ? " Skiff Miller demanded, his brows lowering and an obstinate flush of blood reddening his forehead.

" I said the dog doesn't go, and that settles it. I don't believe he's your dog. You may have seen him some time. You may even some time have driven him from his owner. But his obeying the ordinary driving commands of the Alaskan trail is no demonstration that he is yours. Any dog in Alaska would obey you as he obeyed. Besides, he is undoubtedly a valuable dog, as dogs go in Alaska, and that is sufficient explanation of your desire to get possession of him. Anyway, you've got to prove property."

Skiff Miller, cool and collected, the obstinate flush a trifle deeper on his forehead, his huge muscles bulging under the black cloth of his coat, carefully looked the poet up and down as though measuring the strength of his slenderness.

The Klondiker's face took on a contemptuous expression as he said finally, "I reckon there's nothin' in sight to prevent me takin' the dog right here an' now."

Walt's face reddened, and the striking muscles of his arms and shoulders seemed to stiffen and grow tense. His wife fluttered apprehensively into the breach.

"Maybe Mr. Miller is right," she said. "I am afraid that he is. Wolf does seem to know him, and certainly he answers to the name of 'Brown.' He made friends with him instantly, and you know that's something he never did with anybody before. Besides, look at the way he barked. He was just bursting with joy. Joy over what? Without doubt at finding Mr. Miller."

Walt's striking-muscles relaxed, and his shoulders seemed to droop with hopelessness.

"I guess you're right, Madge," he said. "Wolf isn't Wolf, but Brown, and he must belong to Mr. Miller."

"Perhaps Mr. Miller will sell him," she suggested. "We can buy him."

Skiff Miller shook his head, no longer belligerent, but kindly, quick to be generous in response to generousness.

"I had five dogs," he said, casting about for the easiest way to temper his refusal. "He was the leader. They was the crack team of Alaska. Nothin' could touch 'em. Once I refused five thousand dollars for the bunch. Dogs was high, then, anyway; but that wasn't what made the fancy price. It was the team itself. Brown was the best in the team. That winter I refused twelve hundred for 'm. I didn't sell 'm then, and I ain't a-sellin' 'm now. Besides, I think a mighty lot of that dog. I've ben lookin' for 'm for three years. It made me fair sick when I found he'd ben stole—not the value of him, but the—well, I liked 'm like hell, that's all, beggin' your pardon. I couldn't believe my eyes when I seen 'm just now. I thought I was dreamin'. It was too good to be true. Why, I was his wet-nurse. I put 'm to bed, snug every night. His mother died, and I brought 'm up on condensed milk at two dollars a can when I couldn't afford it in my own coffee. He never knew any mother but me. He used to suck my finger regular, the darn little cuss—that finger right there!"

And Skiff Miller, too overwrought for speech, held up a forefinger for them to see.

"That very finger," he managed to articulate, as though it somehow clinched the proof of ownership and the bond of affection.

He was still gazing at his extended finger when Madge began to speak.

"But the dog," she said. "You haven't considered the dog."

Skiff Miller looked puzzled.

"Have you thought about him?" she asked.

"Don't know what you're drivin' at," was the response.

"Maybe the dog has some choice in the matter," Madge went on. "Maybe he has his likes and desires. You have not considered him. You give him no choice. It has never entered your mind that possibly he might prefer California to Alaska. You consider only what you like. You do with him as you would with a sack of potatoes or a bale of hay."

This was a new way of looking at it, and Miller was visibly impressed as he debated it in his mind. Madge took advantage of his indecision.

"If you really love him, what would be happiness to him would be your happiness also," she urged.

Skiff Miller continued to debate with himself, and Madge stole a glance of exultation at her husband, who looked back warm approval.

"What do you think?" the Klondiker suddenly demanded.

It was her turn to be puzzled. "What do you mean?" she asked.

"D'ye think he'd sooner stay in California?"

She nodded her head with positiveness. "I'm sure of it."

Skiff Miller again debated with himself, though this time aloud, at the same time running his gaze in a judicial way over the mooted animal.

"He was a good worker. He's done a heap of work for me. He never loafed on me, an' he was a joe-dandy at hammerin' a raw team into shape. He's got a head on him. He can do everything but talk. He knows what you say to him. Look at 'm now. He knows we're talkin' about him."

The dog was lying at Skiff Miller's feet, head close down on paws, ears erect and listening, and eyes that were quick and eager to follow the sound of speech as it fell from the lips of first one and then the other.

"An' there's a lot of work in 'm yet. He's good for years to come. An' I do like him. I like him like hell."

Once or twice after that Skiff Miller

opened his mouth and closed it again without speaking. Finally he said:

"I'll tell you what I'll do. Your remarks, ma'am, has some weight in them. The dog's worked hard, and maybe he's earned a soft berth an' has got a right to choose. Anyway, we'll leave it up to him. Whatever he says, goes. You people stay right here settin' down. I'll say good-bye and walk off casual-like. If he wants to stay, he can stay. If he wants to come with me, let 'm come. I won't call 'm to come an' don't you call 'm to come back."

He looked with a sudden suspicion at Madge, and added: "Only you must play fair. No persuadin' after my back is turned."

"We'll play fair," Madge began, but Skiff Miller broke in on her assurances.

"I know the ways of women," he announced. "Their hearts is soft. When their hearts is touched they're like to stack the cards, look at the bottom of the deck, an' lie like the devil—beggin' your pardon, ma'am. I'm only discoursin' about women in general."

"I don't know how to thank you," Madge quavered.

"I don't see as you've got any call to thank me," he replied. "Brown ain't decided yet. Now you won't mind if I go away slow? It's no more'n fair, seein' I'll be out of sight inside a hundred yards."

Madge agreed, and added, "And I promise you faithfully that we won't do anything to influence him."

"Well, then, I might as well be gettin' along," Skiff Miller said in the ordinary tones of one departing.

At this change in his voice, Wolf lifted his head quickly, and still more quickly got to his feet when the man and woman shook hands. He sprang up on his hind-legs, resting his fore-paws on her hip and at the same time licking Skiff Miller's hand. When the latter shook hands with Walt, Wolf repeated this act, resting his weight on Walt and licking both men's hands.

"It ain't no picnic, I can tell you that," were the Klondiker's last words, as he turned and went slowly up the trail.

For the distance of twenty feet Wolf watched him go, himself all eagerness and expectancy, as though waiting for the man to turn and retrace his steps. Then, with a quick, low whine, Wolf sprang after him, overtook him, caught his hand between his teeth with reluctant tenderness, and strove gently to make him pause.

Failing in this, Wolf raced back to where Walt Irvine sat, catching his coat sleeve in his teeth and trying vainly to drag him after the retreating man.

¶

WOLF'S perturbation began to wax. He desired ubiquity. He wanted to be in two places at the same time, with the old master and the new, and steadily the distance between them was increasing. He sprang about excitedly, making short, nervous leaps and twists, now toward one, now toward the other, in painful indecision, not knowing his own mind, desiring both and unable to choose, uttering quick, sharp whines, and beginning to pant.

He sat down abruptly on his haunches, thrusting his nose upward, the mouth opening and closing with jerking movements, each time opening wider. These jerking movements were in unison with the recurrent spasms that attacked the throat, each spasm severer, and more intense than the preceding one. And in accord with jerks and spasms the larynx began to vibrate, at first silently accompanied by the rush of air expelled from the lungs, then sounding a low, deep note, the lowest in the register of the human ear. All this was the nervous and muscular preliminary to howling.

But just as the howl was on the verge of bursting from the full throat, the wide-opened mouth was closed, the paroxysms ceased, and he looked long and steadily at the retreating man. Suddenly Wolf turned his head, and over his shoulder just as steadily regarded Walt. The appeal was unanswered. Not a word nor a sign did the dog receive, no suggestion and no clue as to what his conduct should be.

A glance ahead to where the old master was nearing the curve of the trail excited him again. He sprang to his feet with a whine, and then, struck by a new idea, turned his attention to Madge. Hitherto he had ignored her, but now, both masters failing him, she alone was left. He went over to her and snuggled his head in her lap, nudging her arm with his nose—an old trick of his when begging for favours. He backed away from her and began writhing and twisting playfully, curveting and prancing, half-rearing and striking his fore-paws to the earth, struggling with all his body, from the

wheedling eyes and flattening ears to the wagging tail, to express the thought that was in him and that was denied him utterance.

This, too, he soon abandoned. He was depressed by the coldness of these humans who had never been cold before. No response could he draw from them, no help could he get. They did not consider him. They were as dead.

He turned and silently gazed after the old master. Skiff Miller was rounding the curve. In a moment he would be gone from view. Yet he never turned his head, plodding straight onward, slowly and methodically, as though possessed of no interest in what was occurring behind his back.

And in this fashion he went out of view. Wolf waited for him to reappear. He waited a long minute, silently, quietly, without movement, as though turned to stone—withal stone quick with eagerness and desire. He barked once, and waited. Then he turned and trotted back to Walt Irvine. He sniffed his hand and dropped down heavily at his feet, watching the trail where it curved emptily from view.

The tiny stream slipping down the mossy lipped stone seemed suddenly to increase the volume of its gurgling noise. Save for the meadow larks, there was no other sound. The great yellow butterflies drifted silently through the sunshine and lost themselves in the drowsy shadows. Madge gazed triumphantly at her husband.

A few moments later Wolf got upon his feet. Decision and deliberation marked his movements. He did not glance at the man and woman. His eyes were fixed up the trail. He had made up his mind. They knew it. And they knew, so far as they were concerned, that the ordeal had just begun.

He broke into a trot, and Madge's lips pursed, forming an avenue for the caressing sound that it was the will of her to send forth. But the caressing sound was not made. She was impelled to look at her husband, and she saw the sternness with which he watched her. The pursed lips relaxed, and she sighed audibly.

Wolf's trot broke into a run. Wider and wider were the leaps he made. Not once did he turn his head, his wolf's brush standing out straight behind him. He cut sharply across the curve of the trail and was gone.

On Pleasing

THE art of pleasing is a very necessary one to possess; but a very difficult one to acquire. It can hardly be reduced to rules; and your own good sense and observation will teach you more of it than I can. Do as you would be done by, is the surest method that I know of pleasing. Observe carefully what pleases you in others, and probably the same things in you will please others.

If you are pleased with the complaisance and attention of others to your humours, your tastes, or your weaknesses, depend upon it, the same complaisance and attention, on your part, to theirs, will equally please them. Take the tone of the company that you are in, and do not pretend to give it; be serious, gay, or even trifling, as you find the present humour of the company: this is an attention due from every individual to the majority.

Do not tell stories in company; there is nothing more tedious and disagreeable: if by chance you know a very short story, and exceedingly applicable to the present subject of conversation, tell it in as few words as possible; and even then, throw out that you do not love to tell stories; but that the shortness of it tempted you.

Of all things, banish the egotism out of your conversation, and never think of entertaining people with your own personal concerns, or private affairs; though they are interesting to you, they are tedious and impertinent to everybody else: besides that, one cannot keep one's own private affairs too secret. Whatever you think your own excellencies may be, do not affectedly display them in company; nor labour, as many people do, to give that turn to the conversation, which may supply you with an opportunity of exhibiting them. If they are real, they will infallibly be discovered, without your pointing them out yourself, and with much more advantage. EARL OF CHESTERFIELD (*Letters to his Son.*)

The Daughter of Huang Chow

A mysterious case in Chinatown and its startling denouement

By SAX ROHMER

IN the saloon bar of a public-house, situated only a few hundred yards from the official frontier of Chinatown, two men sat at a small table in a corner engaged in earnest conversation. They afforded a sharp contrast. One was a thick-set and rather ruffianly-looking fellow, not too cleanly in either person or clothing and, amongst other evidences that at one time he had known the prize ring, possessing a badly broken nose. His companion was dressed with that spruceness which belongs to the successful East End Jew; he was cleanly shaven, of slight build, and alert in manner and address.

Having ordered and paid for two whiskies and sodas, the Jew, raising his glass, nodded to his companion and took a drink. The glitter of a magnificent diamond which he wore seemed to attract the other's attention almost hypnotically.

"Cheerio, Freddy!" said the thick-set man. "Any news?"

"Nothing much," returned the one addressed as Freddy, setting his glass upon the table and selecting a cigarette from a packet.

"I'm not so sure," growled the other, watching him suspiciously. "You've been lying low for a long time, and it's not like you to slack off except when there's something big in sight."

"H'm!" said his companion, lighting his cigarette. "What do you mean exactly?"

Jim Poland—for such was the big man's name—growled and spat reflectively into a spittoon.

"I've had my eye on you, Freddy," he replied; "I've had my eye on you!"

"Oh, have you?" murmured the other. "But tell me what you mean?"

Beneath his suave manner lay a threat, and indeed, Freddy Cohen, known to his associates as "Diamond Fred," was in many ways a formidable personality. He had brought to his chosen profession of crook a first-rate American training, together with all that mental agility and cleverness which belongs to his race, and was at once an object of envy and admiration amongst the fraternity who keep Scotland Yard busy.

Jim Poland, physically a more dangerous character, was not in the same class with him; but he was not without brains of a sort, and Cohen, although smiling agreeably, awaited his reply.

"I mean," growled Poland, "that you're not wasting your time with Lalá Huang for nothing."

"Perhaps not," returned Cohen lightly. "She's a pretty girl. But what business is it of yours?"

"None at all. I ain't interested in 'er good looks, neither are you."

Cohen shrugged and raised his glass.

"Come on," growled Poland, leaning across the table. "I know, and I'm in on it. D'ye hear me? I'm in on it. These are hard times, and we've got to stick together."

"Oh," said Cohen, "that's the game, is it?"

"That's the game right enough. You won't go wrong if you bring me in, even at fifty-fifty, because maybe I know things about old Huang that you don't know."

The Jew's expression changed subtly, and beneath his drooping lids he glanced aside at the speaker. Then:

"It's no promise," he said, "but what do you know?"

Poland bent further over the table.

"Chinatown's being watched again. I heard this morning that Red Kerry was down here."

Cohen laughed.

"Red Kerry!" he echoed. "Red Kerry means nothing in my young life, Jim."

"Don't 'e?" returned Jim, snarling viciously. "The way he cleaned up that dope crowd a while back seemed to show he was no jug, didn't it?"

The Jew made a gesture as if to dismiss the subject.

"All right," continued Poland. "Think that way if you like. But the patrols have been doubled: I suppose you know that? And it's a cert there are special men on duty, ever since the death of that Chink."

Cohen shifted uneasily, glancing about him in a furtive fashion.

"See what I mean?" continued the other. "Chinatown ain't healthy just now."

He finished his whisky at a draught, and, standing up, lurched heavily across to the counter. He returned with two more glasses.

"There's one thing I reckon you don't know," he whispered in Cohen's ear. "I saw that Chink talking to Lalá Huang only a week before the time he was hauled out of Limehouse Reach. I'm wondering, Diamond, if, with all your cleverness, you may not go the same way."

"Don't try to pull the creep stuff on me, Jim," said Cohen uneasily. "What are you driving at, anyway?"

"Well," replied Poland, sipping his whisky reflectively, "how did that Chink get into the river?"

"How the devil do I know?"

"And what killed him? It wasn't drowning, although he was all swelled up."

"See here, old pal," said Cohen, "I know 'Frisco better than you know Limehouse. Let me tell you that this little old Chinatown of yours is pie to me. You're trying to get me figuring on Chinese death traps, secret poisons, and all that junk. Boy, you're wasting your poetry. Even if you did see the Chink with Lalá and I doubt it—oh, don't get excited, I'm speaking plain—there's no connection that I can see between death of said Chink and old Huang Chow."

"Ain't there?" growled Poland huskily. He grasped the other's wrist as in a vice, and bent forward so that his battered face was close to the pale countenance of the Jew. "I've been covering old Huang for months and months. Now I'm going to tell you something. Since the death of that Chink Red Kerry's been covering him too."

"See here!" Cohen withdrew his arm from the other's grasp angrily. "You can't freeze me out of this claim with bogey stuff. You're listed, my lad, and you know it. Chief Inspector Kerry is your pet nightmare. But if he walked in here right now, I could ask him to have a drink. I wouldn't, but I could. You've got the wrong angle, Jim. Lalá likes me fine, and although she doesn't say much, what she does say is straight. I'll ask her to-night about the Chink."

"Then you'll be a fool."

"What's that?"

"I say you'll be a fool, man. I'm warning you, Freddy. There are Chinks and Chinks. All the boys know old Huang Chow has got a regular gold-mine buried somewhere under the floor. But all the boys don't know what I know, and it seems that you don't either."

"What is that?"

Jim Poland bent forward more urgently, again seizing Cohen's wrist, and:

"Huang Chow is a mighty big bug amongst the Chinese," he whispered, glancing cautiously about him. "He's hellish clever and rotten with money. A man like that wants handling. I'm not telling you what I know. But call it fifty-fifty and maybe you'll come out alive."

The brow of Diamond Fred displayed beads of perspiration, and with a blue silk handkerchief which he carried in his breast pocket he delicately dried his forehead.

"You're an old hand at this game, Jim," he muttered. "It amounts to this, I suppose: that if I don't agree you'll queer my game?"

Jim Poland's brow lowered, and he clenched his fists formidably. Then:

"Listen," he said in his hoarse voice. "It ain't your claim any more than mine. You've covered it different, that's all. Yours was always the petticoat lay. Mine's slower but safer. Is anyone else in with you?"

"No."

"Then we'll double up. So I'll tell you something. I was backing out."

"What? You were going to quit?"

"I was."

"Why?"

"Because the thing's too dead easy, and a thing like that always looks like trouble to me."

Freddy Cohen finished his glass of whisky.

"Wait while I get some more drinks," he said.

In this way, then, at about the hour of ten on a stuffy autumn night, in the crowded bar of that Wapping public-house, these two made a compact; and of

its outcome and of the next appearance of Cohen, the Jewish-American cracksman, within the ken of man, I shall now proceed to tell.

II

"I'VE been expecting this," said Chief Inspector Kerry.

He tilted his bowler hat further forward over his brow and contemplated the ghastly exhibit which lay upon the slab of the mortuary. Two other police officers—one in uniform—were present, and they treated the celebrated chief inspector with the deference which he had not only earned but had always demanded from his subordinates.

Earmarked for important promotion, he was an interesting figure as he stood there in the gloomy, ill-lighted place, his pose that of an athlete about to perform a long jump, or perhaps, as it might have appeared to some, that of a dancing-master about to demonstrate a new step.

His close-cropped hair was brilliantly red, and so was his short, wiry, aggressive moustache. He was ruddy of complexion and he looked out unblinkingly upon the world with a pair of steel-blue eyes. Neat he was to spruceness, and whilst of no more than medium height, he had the shoulders of an athlete.

The detective who stood beside him, by name John Durham, had one trait in common with his celebrated superior. This was a quick keenness, a sort of alert vitality which showed in his eyes, and indeed in every line of his thin, clean-shaven face. Kerry had picked him out as the most promising junior in his department.

"Give me the particulars," said the chief inspector. "It isn't robbery. He's wearing a diamond ring worth two hundred pounds."

His diction was rapid and terse—so rapid as to create the impression that he bit off the ends of the longer words. He turned his fierce blue eyes upon the uniformed officer who stood at the end of the slab.

"They are very few, chief inspector," was the reply. "He was hauled out by the river police shortly after midnight, at the lower end of Limehouse Reach. He was alive then—they heard his cry—but he died while they were hauling him into the boat."

"Any statement?" rapped Kerry.

"He was past it, chief inspector. According to the report of the officer in charge, he mumbled something which sounded like: 'It has bitten me,' just before he became unconscious."

"'It has bitten me,'" murmured Kerry. "The divisional surgeon has seen him?"

"Yes, chief inspector. And in his opinion the man did not die from drowning, but from some form of virulent poisoning."

"Poisoning?"

"That's the idea. There will be a further examination, of course. Either a hypodermic injection or a bite."

"A bite?" said Kerry. "The bite of what?"

"That I cannot say, chief inspector. A venomous reptile, I suppose."

Kerry stared down critically at the swollen face of the victim, and then glanced sharply aside at Durham.

"Accounts for his appearance, I suppose," he murmured.

"Yes," said Durham quietly. "He hadn't been in the water long enough to look like that." He turned to the local officer. "Is there any theory as to the point at which he went in?"

"Well, an arrest has been made."

"By whom? Of whom?" rapped Kerry.

"Two constables patrolling the Chinatown arrested a man for suspicious loitering. He turned out to be a well-known criminal—Jim Poland, with a whole list of convictions against him. They're holding him at Limehouse Station, and the theory is that he was operating with——" He nodded in the direction of the body.

"Then who's the smart with the swollen face?" inquired Kerry. "He's a new one on me."

"Yes; but he's been identified by one of the K Division men. He is an American crook with a clean slate so far as this side is concerned. Cohen is his name. And the idea seems to be that he went in at some point between where he was found by the river police and the point at which Jim Poland was arrested."

Kerry snapped his teeth together audibly and:

"I'm open to learn," he said, "that the house of Huang Chow is within that area."

"It is."

"I thought so. He died the same way the Chinaman died a while ago," snapped Kerry savagely. "It looks very queer."

He glanced aside at the local officer. "Cover him up," he ordered and, turning, he walked briskly out of the mortuary, followed by Detective Durham.

Although dawn was not far off this was the darkest hour of the night, so that even the sounds of dockland were muted and the riverside slept as deeply as the great port of London ever sleeps. Vague murmurings there were and distant clankings, with the hum of machinery which is never still.

Few of London's millions were awake at that hour, yet Scotland Yard was awake in the person of the fierce-eyed chief inspector and his subordinate. Perhaps those who lightly criticise the Metropolitan Police Force might have learned a new respect for the tireless vigilance which keeps London clean and wholesome, had they witnessed this scene on the borders of Limehouse, as Kerry, stepping into a waiting taxicab accompanied by Durham, proceeded to Limehouse Police Station.

The arrival of Kerry created something of a stir among the officials on duty. His reputation in these days was at least as great as that of the noisiest Labour member.

The prisoner was in the cells, but the chief inspector elected to interview him in the office; and accordingly, whilst the officer in charge sat at an extremely tidy writing-table, tapping the blotting-pad with a pencil and Detective John Durham stood beside him, Kerry paced up and down the little room, deep in reflection, until the door opened and the prisoner was brought in.

One swift glance the chief inspector gave at the battle-scarred face, and recognised instantly that this was a badly frightened man. Crossing to the table, he took up a typewritten slip which lay there, and:

"Your name is James Poland?" he said. "Four convictions, one robbery with violence."

Jim Poland nodded sullenly.

"You were arrested at the corner of Pekin Street about midnight. What were you doing there?"

"Taking a walk."

"I'll say it again," rapped Kerry, fixing his fierce eyes upon the man's face. "What were you doing there?"

"I've told you."

"And I tell you you're a liar. Where did you leave the man Cohen?"

Poland blinked his small eyes, cleared his throat and looked down at the floor uneasily. Then:

"Who's Cohen?" he grunted.

"You mean, who *was* Cohen?" cried Kerry.

The shot went home. The man clenched his fists and looked about the room from face to face.

"You don't tell me——" he began huskily.

"I've told you," said Kerry. "He's on the slab. Out with the truth; it'll be good for your health."

The man hesitated, then looked up, his eyes half closed and a cunning expression upon his face.

"Make out your own case," he said. "You've got nothing against me."

Kerry snapped his teeth together viciously.

"I've told you what happened to your pal," he warned. "If you're a wise man you'll come in on our side before the same thing happens to you."

"I don't know what you're talking about," growled Poland.

Kerry nodded to the constable at the doorway.

"Take him back," he ordered.

Jim Poland being returned to his cell, Kerry, as the door closed behind the prisoner and his guard, stared across at Durham where he stood beside the table.

"An old hand," he said. "But there's another way." He glanced at the officer in charge. "Hold him till the morning. He'll prove useful."

From his waistcoat pocket he took out a slip of chewing-gum, unwrapped it, and placed the mint-flavoured wafer between his large white teeth. He bit upon it savagely, settled his hat upon his head and, turning, walked towards the door. In the doorway he paused.

"Come with me, Durham," he said. "I am leaving the conduct of the case entirely in your hands from now onwards."

Detective Durham looked surprised and not a little anxious.

"I am doing so for two reasons," continued the chief inspector. "These two reasons I shall now explain."

III

UNLIKE its sister colony in New York, there are no show places in Limehouse. The visitor sees nothing but mean streets

and dark doorways. The superficial inquirer comes away convinced that the romance of the Asiatic district has no existence outside the imagination of writers of fiction. Yet here lies a secret quarter, as secret and as strange, in its smaller way, as its parent in China, which is called the Purple Forbidden City.

On a morning when mist lay over the Thames reaches, softening the harshness of the dock buildings and lending an air of mystery to the vessels stealing out upon the tide, a man walked briskly along Limehouse Causeway, looking about him inquiringly, as one unfamiliar with the neighbourhood. Presently he seemed to recognise a turning to the right, and he pursued this for a time, now walking more slowly.

A European woman, holding a half-caste baby in her arms, stood in an open doorway, watching him uninterestedly. Otherwise, except for one neatly dressed young Chinaman, who passed him about half way along the street, there was nothing which could have told the visitor that he had crossed the border-line dividing west from east and was now in an Oriental town.

A very narrow alleyway between two dingy houses proved to be the spot for which he was looking; and, having stared about him for a while, he entered this alleyway. At the farther end it was crossed, T-fashion, by another alley, the only object of interest being an iron post at the crossing and the scenery being made up entirely of hideous brick walls.

About half way along on the left, set in one of these walls, were strong wooden gates, apparently those of a warehouse. Beside them was a door approached by two very dirty steps. There was a bell-push near the door, but upon neither of these entrances was there any plate to indicate the name of the proprietor of the establishment.

From his pocket-book the visitor extracted a card, consulted something written upon it and then pressed the bell.

It was very quiet in this dingy little court. No sound of the busy thoroughfares penetrated here; and although the passage forming the top of the "T" practically marked the river bank, only dimly could one discern the sounds which belong to a seaport.

Presently the door was opened by a Chinese boy who wore the ordinary native working-dress, and who regarded the man upon the step with oblique, tired-looking eyes.

"Mr. Huang Chow?" asked the caller.

The boy nodded.

"You wantchee him see?"

"If he is at home."

The boy glanced at the card, which the visitor still held between finger and thumb, and extended his hand silently. The card was surrendered. It was that of an antique dealer of Dover Street, Piccadilly, and written upon the back was the following: "Mr. Hampden would like to do business with you." The signature of the dealer followed.

The boy turned and passed along a dim and perfectly unfurnished passage which the opening of the door had revealed, whilst Mr. Hampden stood upon the step and lighted a cigarette.

In less than a minute the boy returned and beckoned to him to come in. As he did so, and the door was closed, he almost stumbled, so dark was the passage.

Presently, guided by the boy, he found himself in a very business-like little office, where a girl sat at an American desk looking up at him inquiringly.

She was of a dark and arresting type. Without being pretty in the European sense, there was something appealing in her fine dark eyes, and she possessed the inviting smile which is the heritage of Eastern women. Her dress was not unlike that of any other business girl, except that the neck of her blouse was cut very low, a fashion affected by many Eurasians, and she wore a gaily coloured sash about her waist and large and very costly pearl ear-rings. As Mr. Hampden paused in the doorway:

"Good morning," said the girl, glancing down at the card which lay upon the desk before her. "You come from Mr. Isaacs, eh?"

She looked at him with a caressing glance from beneath half-lowered lashes, but missed no detail of his appearance. She did not quite like his moustache, and thought that he would have looked better clean-shaven. Nevertheless, he was a well-set-up fellow, and her manner evidenced approval.

"Yes," he replied, smiling genially. "I have a small commission to execute, and I am told that you can help me."

The girl paused for a moment, and then:

"Yes, very likely," she said, speaking good English but with an odd intonation "It is not jade? We have very little jade

"No, no. I wanted an enamelled casket."

"What kind?"

"Cloisonné."

"Cloisonné? Yes, we have several."

She pressed a bell and, glancing up at the boy who had stood throughout the interview at the visitor's elbow, addressed him rapidly in Chinese. He nodded his head and led the way through a second doorway. Closing this, he opened a third and ushered Mr. Hampden into a room which nearly caused him to gasp with astonishment.

One who had blundered from Whitechapel into the Khân Khalil, who had been transported upon a magic carpet from a tube station to the Taj Mahal, or dropped suddenly upon Lebanon hills to find himself looking down upon the pearly domes and jewelled gardens of Damascus, could not well have been more surprised. This great treasure house of old Huang Chow was one of Chinatown's secrets—a secret shared only with those whose commercial interests were identical with the interests of Huang Chow.

The place was artificially lighted by lamps which themselves were beautiful objects of art, and which swung from the massive beams of the ceiling. The floor of the warehouse, which was partly of stone, was covered with thick matting, and spread upon it were rugs and carpets of Karadagh, Kermanshah, Sultanabad and Khorassan, with lesser known loomings of almost equal beauty. Skins of rare beasts overlay the divans. Furniture of ivory, of ebony and lemonwood, preciously inlaid, gave to the place an air of cunning confusion. There were tall cabinets and caskets and chests of exquisite lacquer and enamel, loot of an emperor's palace; robes heavy with gold; slippers studded with jewels, strange carven ivory; glittering weapons; pots, jars and bowls, as delicate and as fragile as the petals of a lily.

Last but not least, sitting cross-legged upon a low couch, was old Huang Chow, smoking a great curved pipe, and peering half blindly across the place through large horn-rimmed spectacles. This couch was set immediately beside a wide ascending staircase, richly carpeted, and on the other side of the staircase, in a corresponding recess, upon a gilded trestle carved to represent the four claws of a dragon, rested perhaps the strangest exhibit of that strange collection—a Chinese coffin of exquisite workmanship.

The boy retired, and Mr. Hampden found himself alone with Huang Chow. No word had been exchanged between master and servant, but:

"Good morning, Mr. Hampden," said the Chinaman in a high, thin voice. "Please be seated. It is from Mr. Isaacs you come?"

IV

Personal report of Detective John Durham to Chief Inspector Kerry, officer in charge of Limehouse inquiry.

"DEAR CHIEF INSPECTOR,—Following your instructions, I returned and interviewed the prisoner Poland in his cell. I took the line which you had suggested, pointing out to him that he had nothing to gain and everything to lose by keeping silent.

"'Answer my questions,' I said, 'and you can walk straight out. Otherwise you'll be up before the magistrate, and on your record alone it will mean a holiday which you probably don't want.'

"He was very truculent, but I got him in a good humour at last, and he admitted that he had been co-operating with the dead man Cohen in an attempt to burgle the house of Huang Chow. His reluctance to go into details seemed to be due rather to fear of Huang Chow than to fear of the law, and I presently gathered that he regarded Huang as responsible for the death not only of Cohen, but also of the Chinaman who was hauled out of the river about three weeks ago, as you will remember. The post-mortem showed that he had died of some kind of poisoning, and when we saw Cohen in the mortuary, his swollen appearance struck me as being very similar to that of the Chinaman. (See my report dated 31st ultimo.)

"He finally agreed to talk if I would promise that he should not be charged and that his name should never be mentioned to anyone in connection with what he might tell me. I promised him that outside the ordinary official routine I would respect his request, and he told me some very curious things, which no doubt have a bearing on the case.

"For instance, he had discovered—I don't know in what way—that the dead Chinaman, whose name was Pi Lung, had

been in negotiation with Huang Chow for some sort of job in his warehouse. Poland had seen the man talking to Huang's daughter, at the end of the alley which leads to the place. He seemed to attach extraordinary importance to this fact. At last:

"'I'll tell you what it is,' he said. 'That Chink was a stranger to Limehouse; I can swear to it. He was a gent of his hands; I reckon they've got 'em in China as well as here. He went out for the old boy's money-box, and finished like Cohen finished.'

"'Make your meaning clearer,' I said.

"'My meaning's this: Old Huang Chow is the biggest dealer in stolen and smuggled valuables from overseas we've got in London. He's something else as well; he's a big swell in China. But here's the point. He's got business with buyers all over London, and they have to pay cash—no cheques. He doesn't bank it. I've proved that. He's got it in gold, or diamonds, or something, being wise to present conditions, hidden there in the house. Pi Lung was after his hoard. He didn't get it. Cohen and me was after it. Where's Cohen?'

"I agreed that it looked very suspicious, and presently:

"'When I went in with Cohen,' continued Poland, 'I knew one thing he didn't know—a short cut into the warehouse. He's been playing pretty-like with Lalá, old Huang's daughter, and it's my belief that he knew where the store was hidden; but he never told me. We knew there were special men on duty, and we'd arranged that I was to give a signal when the patrol had passed. Cohen all the time had planned to double on me. While I was watching down on the causeway end, he climbed up and got in through the skylight I'd shown him. When I got there he was missing, but the skylight was open. I started off after him.'

"Then Poland clutched me, and his fright was very real.

"'I heard a shriek like nothing I ever heard in my life. I saw a light shine through the trap, and then I heard a sort of moaning. Last, I heard a bang, and the light went out. I staggered down the passage half silly, started to run and ran straight into the arms of two coppers.'

"This evidence I thought was conclusive, and in accordance with your instructions I proceeded to Mr. Isaacs in Dover Street. He didn't seem too pleased at my suggestion, but when I pointed out to him that one good turn deserved another, he agreed to give me an introduction to Huang Chow.

"I adopted a very simple disguise, just altering my complexion and sticking on a moustache with spirit gum, hair by hair, and trimming it down military fashion. Everything ran smoothly, and I seemed to make a fairly favourable impression upon Lalá Huang the Chinaman's daughter, who evidently interviews prospective customers before they are admitted to the warehouse.

"She is a Eurasian and extremely good-looking. But when I found myself in the room where old Huang keeps his treasures, I really thought I was dreaming. It's a collection that must be worth thousands. He showed me snuff-bottles, cut out of gems, and with a little opening no bigger than the hole in a pipe-stem, but with wonderful paintings done inside the bottles. He'd got a model of a pagoda made out of human teeth, and a big golden rug woven from the hair of Circassian slave girls. Excuse this, chief inspector, I know it is what you call the romantic stuff; but I think it would have impressed you if you had seen it.

"Anyway, I bought a little enamelled box, in accordance with Mr. Isaacs' instructions, although whether I succeeded in convincing Huang Chow that I knew anything about the matter is more than doubtful. He got up from a sort of throne he sits on and led the way up a broad staircase to a private room above.

"'Of course, you have brought the cash Mr. Hampden?' he said.

"He speaks quite faultless English. He walked up three steps to a sort of raised writing-table in this upstairs room, and I counted out the money to him. When he sat at the table he faced towards the room, and I couldn't help thinking that, in his horn-rimmed spectacles, he looked like some old magistrate. He explained that he would pack the purchase for me, but that I must personally take it away. And:

"'You understand,' said he, 'that you bought it from a gentleman who had purchased it abroad.'

"I said I quite understood. He bowed me out very politely, and presently I found myself back in the office with Lalá Huang.

"She seemed quite disposed to talk, and I chatted with her while the box was being packed for me to take away. I knew I must make good use of my time, but you have never given me a job I liked less. I mean, there is something very appealing about her, and I hated to think that I was playing a double game.

"However, without actually agreeing to see me again, she told me enough to enable me to meet her 'accidentally' if I wanted to. Therefore I am going to look out for her this evening and probably take her to a picture palace, or somewhere where we can have a quiet talk. She seems to be fancy free, and for some reason I feel sorry for the girl. I don't altogether like the job, but I hope to justify your faith in me, chief.

"I will prepare my official report this evening when I return.—Yours obediently, JOHN DURHAM."

V

"NO," said Lalá Huang, "I don't like London—not this part of London."

"Where would you rather be?" asked Durham. "In China?"

Dusk had dropped its merciful curtain over Limehouse, and as the two paced slowly along West India Dock Road it seemed to the detective that a sort of glamour had crept into the scene.

He was a clever man within his limitations, and cultured up to a point; but he was not philosopher enough to know that he viewed the purlieus of Limehouse through a haze of Oriental mystery conjured up by the conversation of his companion. Temple bells there were in the clangour of the road cars. The smoke-stacks had a semblance of pagodas. Burma she had conjured up before him, and China, and the soft islands where she had first seen the light. For as well as a streak of European, there was Kanaka blood in Lalá, which lent her an appeal quite new to Durham, insidious and therefore dangerous.

"Not China," she replied. "Somehow I don't think I shall ever see China again. But my father is rich, and it is dreadful to think that we live here when there are so many more beautiful places to live in."

"Then why does he stay?" asked Durham with curiosity.

"For money, always for money," answered Lalá, shrugging her shoulders.

"Yet if it is not to bring happiness, what good is it?"

"What good indeed?" murmured Durham.

"There is no fun for me," said the girl pathetically. "Sometimes someone nice comes to do business, but mostly they are Jews—Jews, always Jews, and—" Again she shrugged eloquently.

Durham perceived the very opening for which he had been seeking.

"You evidently don't like Jews," he said, endeavouring to speak lightly.

"No," murmured the girl, "I don't think I do. Some are nice, though. I think it is the same with every kind of people; there are good and bad."

"Were you ever in America?" asked Durham.

"No."

"I was just thinking," he explained, "that I have known several American Jews who were quite good fellows."

"Yes," said Lalá, looking up at him naïvely, "I met one not long ago. He was not nice at all."

"Oh!" exclaimed Durham, startled by this admission, which he had not anticipated. "One of your father's customers?"

"Yes, a man named Cohen."

"Cohen?"

"A funny little chap," continued the girl. "He tried to make love to me." She lowered her lashes roguishly. "I knew all along he was pretending. He was a thief, I think. I was afraid of him."

Durham did some rapid thinking. Then: "Did you say his name was Cohen?" he asked.

"That was the name he gave."

"A man named Cohen, an American, was found dead in the river quite recently."

Lalá stopped dead and clutched his arm.

"How do you know?" she demanded.

"There was a paragraph in this morning's paper."

She hesitated. Then:

"Did it describe him?" she asked.

"No," replied Durham, "I don't think it did in detail. At least, the only part of the description which I remember is that he wore a large and valuable diamond on his left hand."

"Oh!" whispered Lalá.

She released her grip of Durham's arm and went on.

"What?" he asked. "Did you think it was someone you knew?"

"I did know him," she replied simply. "The man who was found drowned. It is the same: I am sure now, because of the diamond ring. What paper did you read it in? I want to read it myself."

"I'm afraid I can't remember; it was probably the *Daily Mail*."

"Had he been drowned?"

"I presume so—yes," replied Durham guardedly.

Lalá Huang was silent for some time whilst they paced on through the dusk. Then:

"How strange!" she said in a low voice.

"I am sorry I mentioned it," declared Durham. "But how was I to know it was your friend?"

"He was no friend of mine," returned the girl sharply. "I hated him; but it is strange nevertheless. I am sure he intended to rob my father."

"And is that why you think it strange?"

"Yes," she said, but her voice was almost inaudible.

They were come now to the narrow street communicating with the courtway in which the great treasure house of Huang Chow was situated, and Lalá stopped at the corner.

"It was nice of you to walk along with me," she said. "Do you live in Limehouse?"

"No," replied Durham, "I don't. As a matter of fact, I came down here to-night in the hope of seeing you again."

"Did you?"

The girl glanced up at him doubtfully, and his distaste for the task set him by his superior increased with the passing of every moment. He was a man of some imagination, a great reader, and ambitious professionally. He appreciated the fact that Chief-Inspector Kerry looked for great things from him, but for this type of work he had little inclination.

There was too much chivalry in his make-up to enable him to play upon a woman's sentiments, even in the interests of justice. By whatever means the man Cohen had met his death, and whether or not the Chinaman, Pi Lung, had died by the same hand, Lalá Huang was innocent of any complicity in these matters, he was perfectly well assured.

Doubts were to come later when he was away from her, when he had had leisure to consider that she might regard him in the light of a third potential rifler of her father's treasure house. But at the moment, looking down into her dark eyes, he reproached himself and wondered where his true duty lay.

"It is so grey and dull and sordid here," said the girl, looking down the darkened street. "There is no one much to talk to."

"But you have your business interests to keep you employed during the day, after all."

"I hate it all. I hate it all."

"But you seem to have perfect freedom?"

"Yes. My mother, you see, was not Chinese."

"But you wish to leave Limehouse?"

"I do. I do. Just now it is not so bad, but in the winter how I tire of the grey skies, the endless drizzling rain. Oh!" She shrank back into the shadow of a doorway, clutching at Durham's arm.

"Don't let Ah Fu see me."

"Ah Fu? Who is Ah Fu?" asked Durham, also drawing back as a furtive figure went slinking down the opposite side of the street.

"My father's servant. He let you in this morning."

"And why must he not see you?"

"I don't trust him. I think he tells my father things."

"What is it that he carries in his hand?"

"A birdcage, I expect."

"A birdcage?"

"Yes!"

He caught the gleam of her eyes as she looked up at him out of the shadow.

"Is he, then, a bird-fancier?"

"No, no; I can't explain, because I don't understand myself. But Ah Fu goes to a place in Shadwell regularly and buys young birds, always very young ones and very little ones."

"For what or for whom?"

"I don't know."

"Have you an aviary in your house?"

"No."

"Do you mean that they disappear, these purchases of Ah Fu's?"

"I often see him carrying a cage of young birds, but we have no birds in the house."

"How perfectly extraordinary!" said Durham.

"I distrust Ah Fu," whispered the girl. "I am glad he did not see me with you."

"Young birds," murmured Durham absently. "What kind of young birds? Any particular breed?"

"No; canaries, linnets—all sorts. Isn't it funny?" The girl laughed in a childish way. "And now I think Ah Fu will have gone in, so I must say good-night."

But when presently Detective Durham found himself walking back along West India Dock Road, his mind's eye was set upon the slinking figure of a Chinaman carrying a birdcage.

VI

ONE Chinaman, more or less, does not make any very great difference to the authorities responsible for maintaining law and order in Limehouse. Asiatic settlers are at liberty to follow their national propensities, and to knife one another within reason. This is wisdom. Such recreations are allowed, if not encouraged, by all wise rulers of Eastern peoples.

"Found drowned," too, is a verdict which has covered many a dark mystery of old Thames; but "Found in the river, death having been due to the action of some poison unknown," is a finding which even in the case of a Chinaman, is calculated to stimulate the jaded official mind.

New Scotland Yard had given Durham a roving commission, and had been justified in the fact that the second victim, and this time not a Chinaman, had been found under almost identical conditions. The link with the establishment of Huang Chow was incomplete, and Durham fully recognised that it was up to him to make it sound and incontestable.

Jim Poland was not the only man in the East End who knew that the dead Chinaman had been in negotiation with Huang Chow. Kerry knew it, and had passed the information on to Durham.

Some mystery surrounded the life of the old dealer, who was said to be a mandarin of high rank, but his exact association with the death first of the Chinaman, Pi Lung, and second, of Cohen, remained to be proved. Certain critics have declared the Metropolitan detective service to be obsolete and inefficient. Kerry, as a potential superintendent, resented these criticisms, and in his protégé, Durham, perceived a member of the new generation who was likely in time to produce results calculated to remove this stigma.

Durham recognised that a greater responsibility rested upon his shoulders than the actual importance of the case might have indicated; and now, proceeding warily along the deserted streets, he found his brain to be extraordinarily active and his imagination very much alive.

There is a night life in Limehouse, as he had learned, but it is a mole life, a subterranean life, of which no sign appears above ground after a certain hour. Nevertheless, as he entered the area which harbours those strange, hidden resorts the rumour of which has served to create the glamour of Chinatown, he found himself to be thinking of the great influence said to be wielded by Huang Chow, and wondering if unseen spies watched his movements.

Lalá was Oriental, and now, alone in the night, distrust leapt into being within him. He had been attracted by her and had pitied her. He told himself now that this was because of her dark beauty and the essentially feminine appeal which she made. She was perhaps a vampire of the most dangerous sort, one who lured men to strange deaths for some sinister object beyond reach of a Western imagination.

He found himself doubting the success of those tactics upon which, earlier in the day, he had congratulated himself. Perhaps beneath the guise of Hampden, who bought antique furniture on commission, those cunning old eyes beneath the horn-rimmed spectacles had perceived the detective hidden, or at least had marked subterfuge.

Whilst he could not count Lalá a conquest—for he had not even attempted to make love to her—the ease with which he had developed the acquaintance now afforded matter for suspicion.

At the entrance to the court communicating with the establishment of Huang Chow he paused, looking cautiously about him. The men on the Limehouse beats had been warned of the investigations afoot to-night, and there was a plain-clothes man on point duty at no great distance away, although carefully hidden, so that Durham had quite failed to detect his presence.

Durham wore rough clothes and rubber-soled shoes; and now, as he entered the court, he was thinking of the official report of the police sergeant who, not so many hours before, had paid a visit to the house of Huang Chow in order to question him respecting his knowledge of the dead man Cohen, and to learn when last he had seen him.

Old Huang, who had received his caller in the large room upstairs, the room which boasted the presence of the writing-dais, had exhibited no trace of confusion, assuring the sergeant that he had not seen the man Cohen for several days. Cohen had come to him with an American introduction which he, Huang, believed to be forged, and had wanted him to undertake a shady agency, respecting the details of which he remained peculiarly reticent. In short, nothing had been gained by this official interrogation, and Huang blandly denied any knowledge of an attempted burglary of his establishment.

"What have I to lose?" he had asked the inquirer. "A lot of old lumber which I have accumulated during many years, and a reputation for being very wealthy, due to my lonely habits and to the ignorance of those who live around me."

Durham, mentally reviewing the words of the report, reconstructed the scene in his mind; and now, having come to the end of the lane where the iron post rested, he stood staring up at a place in the ancient wall where several bricks had decayed, and where it was possible, according to the statement of the man Poland, to climb up on to a piece of sloping roof and from thence gain the skylight through which Cohen had obtained admittance on the night of his death.

He made sure that his automatic pistol was in his pocket, questioned the dull sounds of the riverside for a moment, looking about him anxiously, and then, using the leaning post as a stepping-stone, he succeeded in wedging his foot into a crevice in the wall. By the exercise of some agility he scrambled up to the top, and presently found himself lying upon a sloping roof.

The skylight remained well out of reach, but his rubber-soled shoes enabled him to creep up the slates until he could grasp the framework with his hands. Presently he found himself perched upon the trap which, if his information could be relied upon, possessed no fastener, or one so faulty that the trap could be raised by means of a bradawl. He carried one in his pocket, and screwing it into the framework he lifted cautiously, making very little noise.

The trap opened, and up to his nostrils there stole a queer, yet indefinable odour, partly that which belongs to old Oriental furniture and stuffs, but having mingled with it a hint of incense and of something not so easily named.

He immediately recognised the smell of that strange store-room, which, as Mr. Hampden, he had recently visited.

For one moment he thought he could detect the distant note of a bell. But, listening intently, he heard nothing, and was reassured.

He rested the trap back against the frame and shone the ray of an electric torch down into the darkness beneath him. The light fell upon the top of a low carven table, dragon-legged and gilded. Upon it rested the model pagoda constructed of human teeth, and there was something in this discovery which made Durham feel inclined to shudder. However, the impulse was only a passing one.

He measured the distance with his eye. The little table stood beside a deep divan, and he saw that with care it would be possible to drop upon this divan without making much noise. He calculated its exact position before replacing the torch

UNREST

I AM impatient of so many things,
And so, I think, are you, for I have seen
The hunger grow like magic in your eyes,
The longing fall like shadows in between.

Love, were we still light-hearted as of old,
Seeking the glitter of uncharted seas,
Who knows what Isles Romantic might arise
Through mists that drift before the morning breeze.

But we have lost the early ways of yearning,
In drowsy lands we pass the hours asleep,
While all around us still the earth is teeming
With beauty for the hearts that beauty keep. R. FORTESCUE DORIA.

in his pocket, and then, resting back against one side of the frame, he clutched the other with his hands. He wriggled gradually down until further progress became impossible. He then let himself drop, and swung for a moment by his hands before letting go.

He fell, as he had calculated, upon the divan. It creaked ominously. Catching his foot in the cushions he stumbled and lay forward for a moment upon his face, listening intently.

The room was very hot, but nothing stirred.

VII

DETECTIVE DURHAM, as he lay there inhaling the peculiar perfume of the place, recognised that he had put himself outside the pale of official protection, and was become technically a burglar.

He wondered if Chief-Inspector Kerry would have approved; but he had outlined this plan of investigation for himself and knew well that, if it were crowned by success, the end would be regarded as having justified the means. On the other hand, in the event of detection he must personally bear the consequences of such irregular behaviour. He knew well, however, that his celebrated superior had achieved promotion by methods at least as irregular; and he knew that if he could but obtain evidence to account for the death of the man Cohen, and of the Chinaman, Pi Lung, who had preceded him by the same mysterious path, the way of his obtaining it would not be too closely questioned.

He was an ambitious man, and consequently one who took big chances. Nothing disturbed the silence; he sat upon the divan and again pressed the button of his torch, shining it all about the low-beamed apartment and peering curiously into the weird shadows of the place. He calculated he was now in the position which Cohen had occupied during the last moments of his life, and a sense of the uncanny touched him coldly.

As he thought of the unnatural screams spoken of by Poland, some strange instinct prompted him to curl up his feet upon the divan again, as though a secret menace crawled upon the floor amid its many rugs and carpets.

He must now endeavour to reconstruct the plan upon which the American cracksman had operated. Poland had a persistent belief that Cohen had known where the fabled hoard of Huang Chow was concealed.

Durham began a deliberate inspection of the place. He thought it unlike a wily old Chinaman, assuming that he possessed hidden wealth, to keep it in so accessible a spot as this. It was far more probable that he had a fireproof safe in the room upstairs, perhaps built into the wall. Yet, according to Poland's account, it was in this room and not in any other that death came to Diamond Fred.

The wall-hangings first engaged Durham's attention. He moved them aside systematically, one after another, seeking for any hiding-place, but failing to find one. The door communicating with the outer office he found to be locked, but he did not believe for a moment that the office would be worthy of inspection.

There were cases containing jewelled weapons and cups and goblets inlaid with precious stones, but none of these seemed to have been tampered with, and all were locked, as was the big cabinet containing the snuff-bottles.

Many of the larger pieces about the place contained drawers and cupboards, and these he systematically opened one after another, without making any discovery of note. Some of the cupboards contained broken pieces of crockery and more or less damaged curios of one kind and another, but none of them gave him the clue for which he was seeking.

He examined the couch upon which Huang Chow had been seated when first he had met him, but although he searched it scientifically he was rewarded by no discovery.

A very fusty and unpleasant smell was more noticeable at this point than elsewhere in the room, and he found himself staring speculatively up the wide, carpeted stairs. Next he turned his attention to the lacquered coffin which occupied the corresponding recess to that filled by the couch. It was an extraordinarily ornate piece of lacquer work and probably of great value.

The lid appeared to be screwed on, and Durham stood staring at the thing, half-revolted and half-fascinated. He failed to discover any means of opening it, however, and when he tried to move it bodily found it very heavy. He came to the conclusion that all the portable valuables were contained in locked cases or cabinets, and out of this discovery grew an idea.

The case containing the snuff-bottles stood too close to the wall to enable him to test his new theory, but a square, flat case near the office door, in which were five or six small but almost priceless pieces of porcelain, afforded the very evidence for which he was looking.

Thin electric flex descended from somewhere inside the case down to one of the legs of the pedestal and through a neatly drilled hole in the floor, evidently placed there to accommodate it.

" Burglar alarm ! " he muttered.

The opening of this case, and doubtless of any of the others, would set alarm bells ringing. This was not an unimportant discovery, but it brought him very little nearer to a solution of the chief problem which engaged his mind. Assuming that Cohen had opened one of the cases and had alarmed old Huang Chow, what steps had the latter taken to deal with the intruder which had resulted in so ghastly a death And how had he disposed of the body ?

As Durham stood there musing and looking down through the plate glass at the delicate porcelain beneath, a faint sound intruded itself upon the stillness. It gave him another idea. Part of the floor was stone-paved, but part was wood.

Upon a portion of the latter, where no carpet rested, Durham dropped flat, pressing his ear to the floor.

A faint swishing and trickling sound was perceptible from some place beneath.

" Ah ! " he murmured.

Remembering that the premises almost overhung the Thames, he divined that the cellars were flooded at high tide, or that there was some kind of drain or cutting running underneath the house.

He stood up again, listening intently for any sound within the building. He thought he had detected something and now, as he stood there alert, he heard it again—a faint scuffling, which might have been occasioned by rats or even mice, but which, in some subtle and very unpleasant way, did not suggest the movements of these familiar rodents.

Even as he detected the sound it ceased, leaving him wondering and uncomfortably conscious of a sudden dread of his surroundings. He wondered in what part of this mysterious house Lalá resided, and recognising that his departure must leave traces, he determined to prosecute his inquiries as far as possible, since another opportunity might not arise.

He was baffled but still hopeful. Something there was in the smell of the place which threatened to unnerve him. Or perhaps in its silence, which remained quite unbroken save when, by acute listening, one detected the dripping of water.

That unexplained scuffling sound, too, which he had failed to trace or identify, lingered in his memory insistently, and for some reason contained the elements of fear.

He crossed the room and began softly to mount the stairs. They creaked only slightly, and the door at the top proved to be ajar. He peeped in to find the place empty. It was a typical Chinese apartment, containing very little furniture, the raised desk being the most noticeable item, except for a small shrine which faced it on the other side of the room.

He mounted the steps to the desk and inspected a number of loose papers which lay upon it. Without exception they were written in Chinese. A sort of large, dull, white blotting-pad lay upon the table, but its surface was smooth and glossy.

Over it was suspended what looked like a lampshade, but on inspection it proved to contain no lamp, but to communicate, by a sort of funnel, with the ceiling above.

At this contrivance Durham stared long and curiously, but without coming to any conclusion respecting its purpose. He might have investigated farther, but he became aware of a dull and regular sound in the room behind him.

He turned in a flash, staring in the direction of two curtains draped before what he supposed to be a door.

On tiptoe he crossed and gently drew the curtains aside.

He looked into a small, cell-like room. lighted by one window, where upon a low bed old Huang Chow lay sleeping peacefully.

Durham almost held his breath, then, withdrawing as quietly as he had approached, he descended the stair. At the foot his attention was again arrested by the faint scuffling sound. It ceased as suddenly as it had begun, leaving him wondering and conscious anew of a chill of apprehension.

He had already made his plans for departure, but knew that they must leave evidence, when discovered, of his visit.

A large and solid table stood near the

divan, and he moved this immediately under the trap. Upon it he laid a leopard skin to deaden any noise he might make, and then upon the leopard skin stood a massive chair; he replaced his torch in his pocket and drew himself up on to the roof again. He re-closed the trap by means of the awl which he had screwed into it, removed the awl and placed it in his pocket.

Then sliding gently down the sloping roof he dropped back into the deserted court.

VIII

"NO," said Lalá, "we have never had robbers in the house." She looked up at Durham naïvely. "You are not a thief, are you?" she asked.

"No, I assure you I am not," he answered, and felt himself flushing to the roots of his hair.

They were seated in a teashop patronised by the workers of the district; and as Durham, his elbows resting on the marble-topped table, looked into the dark eyes of his companion, he told himself again that whatever might be the secrets of old Huang Chow, his daughter did not share them.

The Chinaman had made no report to the authorities, although the piled up furniture beneath the skylight must have afforded conclusive evidence that a burglarious entry had been made into the premises.

"I should feel very nervous," Durham declared, "with all those valuables in the house."

"I feel nervous about my father," the girl answered in a low voice. "His room opens out of the warehouse, but mine is shut away in another part of the building. And Ah Fu sleeps alone behind the office."

"Were you not afraid when you suspected that Cohen was a burglar? You told me yourself that you did suspect him."

"Yes, I spoke to my father about it."

"And what did he say?"

"Oh"—she shrugged her shoulders—"he just smiled and told me not to worry."

"And that was the last you heard about the matter?"

"Yes, until you told me he was dead."

Again he questioned the dark eyes and again was baffled. He felt tempted, and not for the first time, to throw up the case. After all, it rested upon very slender data—the mysterious death of a Chinaman whose history was unknown and the story of a crook whose word was worth nothing.

Finally he asked himself, as he had asked himself before, what did it matter? If old Huang Chow had disposed of these people in some strange manner, they had sought to rob him. The morality of the case was complicated and obscure, and more and more he was falling under the spell of Lalá's dark eyes.

But always it was his professional pride which came to the rescue. Murder had been done, whether justifiably or otherwise, and to him had been entrusted the discovery of the murderer. It seemed that failure was to be his lot, for if Lalá knew anything she was a most consummate actress, and if she did not, his last hope of information was gone.

He would have liked nothing better than to be rid of the affair, provided he could throw up the case with a clear conscience. But when presently he parted from the attractive Eurasian and watched her slim figure as, turning, she waved her hand and disappeared around a corner, he knew that rest was not for him.

He had discovered the emporium of a Shadwell live-stock dealer with whom Ah Fu had a standing order for newly fledged birds of all descriptions. Purchases apparently were always made after dusk, and Ah Fu with his birdcage was due that evening.

A scheme having suggested itself to Durham, he now proceeded to put it into execution, so that when dusk came and Ah Fu, carrying an empty birdcage, set out from the house of Huang Chow, a very dirty-looking loafer passed the corner of the street at about the time that the Chinaman came slinking out.

Durham had mentally calculated that Ah Fu would be gone about half an hour upon his mysterious errand, but the Chinaman travelled faster than he had calculated.

Just as he was about to climb up once more on to the sloping roof, he heard the pattering footsteps returning to the courtyard, although rather less than twenty minutes had elapsed since the man had set out.

Durham darted around the corner and waited until he heard the door closed; then, returning, he scrambled up on to the roof, creeping forward until he was lying looking down through the skylight into the darkened room below.

For ten minutes or more he waited, until he began to feel cramped and uncomfortable. Then that happened which he had hoped and anticipated would happen. The place beneath became illuminated, not fully, by means of the hanging lamps, but dimly so that distorted shadows were cast about the floor. Someone had entered, carrying a lantern.

Durham's viewpoint limited his area of vision, but presently, as the light came nearer and nearer, he discerned Ah Fu, carrying a lantern in one hand and a birdcage in the other. He could hear nothing, for the trap fitted well and the glass was thick. Moreover it was very dirty. He was afraid, however, to attempt to clean a space.

Ah Fu apparently had set the lantern upon a table, and into the radius of its light there presently moved a stooping figure. Durham recognised Huang Chow, and felt his heart-beats increasing in rapidity.

Clutching the framework of the trap with his hands, he moved his head cautiously, so that presently he was enabled to see the two Chinamen. They were standing beside the lacquered coffin upon its dragon-legged pedestal. Durham stifled an exclamation.

One end of the ornate sarcophagus had been opened in some way!

Now, to the watcher's unbounded astonishment, Ah Fu placed the birdcage in the opening, and apparently re-closed the trap in the end of the coffin. He made other manipulations with his bony yellow fingers, which Durham failed to comprehend. Finally the birdcage was withdrawn again, and as it was passed before the light of the lantern he saw that it was empty, whereas previously it had contained a number of tiny birds all huddled up together!

The light gleamed upon the spectacles of Huang Chow. Watching him, Durham saw him take out from a hidden drawer in the pedestal a long, slender key, insert it in a lock concealed by the ornate carving, and then slightly raise the lid which had so recently defied his own efforts.

He raised it only a few inches, and then, taking up the lantern, peered into the interior of the coffin, at the same time waving his hand in dismissal to Ah Fu. For a while he stood there peering into the interior, and then, lowering the lid again, he relocked this gruesome receptacle and, lantern in hand, began to mount the stairs.

Durham inhaled deeply. He realised that during the last few seconds he had been holding his breath. Now, as he began to creep back down the slope, he discovered that his hands were shaking.

He dropped down into the court again, and for several minutes leaned against the wall, endeavouring to reason out an explanation of what he had seen, and in a measure to regain his composure.

There was a horror underlying it all which he was half afraid to face. But the real clue to the mystery still eluded him.

Whether what he had witnessed was some kind of obscene ceremony, or whether an explanation more vile must be sought, he remained undetermined. He must repeat his exploit if possible, and once more gain access to the room which contained the lacquer coffin.

But the adventure was very distasteful. He recollected the smell of the place, and the memory brought with it a sense of nausea. He thought of Lalá Huang, and his ideas became grotesque and chaotic. Yet the solution of the mystery lay at last within his grasp, and to the zest of the investigator everything else became subjugated. He walked slowly away, silent in his rubber-soled shoes.

IX

LALÁ HUANG lay listening to the vague sounds which disturbed the silence of the night. Presently her thoughts made her sigh wearily. During the lifetime of her mother, who had died while Lalá was yet a little girl, life had been different and so much brighter.

She imagined that in the mingled sounds of dock and river which came to her she could hear the roar of surf upon a golden beach. The stuffy air of Limehouse took on the hot fragrance of a tropic island, and she sighed again, but this time rapturously, for in spirit she was a child once more, lulled by the voice of the great Pacific.

Young as she was the death of her mother had been a blow from which it had taken her several years to recover. Then had commenced those long travels with her father from port to port, from ocean to ocean, sometimes settling awhile, but ever moving onward, onward.

He had had her educated after a fashion, and his love for her she did not doubt. But her mother's blood spoke more strongly than that part of her which was Chinese, and there was softness and a delicious languor in her nature which her father did not seem to understand, and of which he did not appear to approve.

She knew that he was wealthy. She knew that his ways were not straight ways although that part of his business to which he had admitted her as an assistant, and an able one, was legitimate enough, or so it seemed.

Consignments of goods arrived at strange hours of the night to the establishment in Limehouse, and from this side of her father's transactions she was barred. The big double doors opening on the little courtyard would be opened by Ah Fu and packing-cases of varying sizes taken in. Sometimes the sounds of these activities would reach her in her room in a distant part of the house; but only in the morning would she recognise their significance, when in the warehouse she would discover that some new and choice piece had arrived.

She wondered with what object her father accumulated wealth, and hoped, against the promptings of her common sense, that he designed to return East, there to seek a retirement amidst the familiar and the beautiful things of the Orient which belonged to Lalá's dream of heaven.

Stories about her father often reached her ears. She knew that he had held high rank in China before she had been born; but that he had sacrificed his rights in some way had always been her theory. She had been too young to understand the stories which her mother had told her sometimes; but that there were traits in the character of Huang Chow which it was not good for his daughter to know, she appreciated and accepted as a secret sorrow.

He allowed her all the freedom to which her education entitled her. Her life was that of a European and not of an Oriental woman. She loved him in a way, but also feared him. She feared the dark and cruel side of his character, of which, at various periods during their life together, she had had terrifying glimpses.

She had decided that cruelty was his vice. In what way he gratified it she had never learned, nor did she desire to do so. There were periodical visits from the police, but she had learned long ago that her father was too clever to place himself within reach of the law.

However crooked one part of his business methods might be, his dealings with his clients were straight enough, so that no one had any object in betraying him; and the legality or otherwise of his foreign relations evidently afforded no case against him upon which the authorities could act, or upon which they cared to act.

In America it had been graft which had protected him. She had learned this accidentally, but never knew whether he bought his immunity in the same way in London.

Some of the rumours which reached her were terrifying. Latterly she had met many strange glances in her comings and goings about Limehouse. This peculiar atmosphere had always preceded the break-up of every home which they had shared. She divined the fact that in some way Huang Chow had outstayed his welcome in Chinatown, London. Where their next resting place would be she could not imagine, but she prayed that it might be in sunnier climes.

She found herself to be thinking over much of John Hampden. His bona-fides were not above suspicion, but she could scarcely expect to meet a really white man in such an environment.

Lalá would have liked to think that he was white, but could not force herself to do so. She would have liked to think that he sought her company because she appealed to him personally; but she had detected the fact that another motive underlay his attentions. She wondered if he could be another of those moths drawn by the light of that fabled wealth of her father.

It was curious, she reflected, that Huang Chow never checked—indeed, openly countenanced—her friendship with the many chance acquaintances she had made, even when her own instincts told her that the men were crooked; so that, knowing the acumen of her father, she was well aware that he must know it, too.

Several of these pseudo-lovers of hers had died. It was a point which often occurred to her mind, but upon which she did not care to dwell even now. But John Hampden—John Hampden was different. He was not wholly sincere—she sighed wearily. But nevertheless, he was not like some of the others.

She started up in bed, seized with a sudden dreadful idea. He was a detective!

She understood now why she had found so much that was white in him, but so much that was false. His presence seemed to be very near her. Something caressing in his voice echoed in her mind. She found herself to be listening to the muted sounds of Limehouse, and of the waterway which flowed so close beside her.

That old longing for the home of her childhood returned tenfold, and tears began to trickle down her cheeks. She was falling in love with this man, whose object was her father's ruin. A cold terror clutched at her heart. Even now, whilst their friendship was so new, so strange, there was a query, a stark, terrifying query, to stand up before her.

If put to the test, which would she choose?

She was unable to face that issue, and dropped back upon her pillow, stifling a sob.

Yes, he was a detective. In some way her father had at last attracted the serious attention of the law. Rumours of this were flying around Chinatown, to which she had not been entirely deaf. She thought of a hundred questions, a hundred silences, and grew more and more convinced of the truth.

What did he mean to do? Before her a ghostly company uprose—the shadows of some she had known with designs upon her father. John Hampden's design was different. But might he not join that mysterious company?

Now again she suddenly sprang upright, this time because of a definite sound which had reached her ears from within the house. A very faint, bell-like tinkling which ceased almost immediately. She had heard it one night before, and quite recently. Indeed on the night before she had met John Hampden. Cohen the Jew had died that night!

She sprang lightly on to the floor, found her slippers, and threw a silk kimono over her nightrobe. She tiptoed cautiously to the door and opened it.

It was at this very moment that old Huang Chow, asleep in his cell-like apartment, was aroused by the tinkling of a bell set immediately above his head. He awoke instantly, raised his hand and stopped the bell. His expression, could anyone have been present to see it, was a thing unpleasant to behold. Triumph was in it and cunning cruelty.

His long, yellow fingers reached out for his horn-rimmed spectacles, which lay upon a little table beside him. Adjusting them he pulled the curtains aside and shuffled silently across the large room.

Mounting the steps to the raised writing-table he rested his elbows upon it, and peered down at that curious blotting-pad which had so provoked the curiosity of Durham. Could Durham have seen it now the mystery must have been solved. It was part of an ingenious camera obscura apparatus, and, dimly depicted upon its surface, appeared a reproduction of part of the storehouse beneath! The part of it which was visible was that touched by the light of an electric torch, carried by a man crossing the floor in the direction of the lacquered coffin upon the gilded pedestal!

Old Huang Chow chuckled silently, and his yellow fingers clutched the table edge, as he moved to peer more closely into the picture.

"Poor fool!" he whispered in Chinese. "Poor fool!"

It was the man who had come with the introduction from Mr. Isaacs—a new impostor who sought to rob him, who sought to obtain information from his daughter, who had examined his premises last night and had even penetrated upstairs, so that he, old Huang Chow, had been compelled to disconnect the apparatus and to feign sleep under the scrutiny of the intruder.

To-night it would be otherwise. Ah, yes. To-night it would be otherwise.

X

DURHAM gently raised the trap in the roof of Huang Chow's treasure house. He was prepared for snares and pitfalls. No sane man, on the evidence which he, Durham, had been compelled to leave behind, would have neglected to fasten the skylight which so obviously afforded a means of entrance into his premises.

Therefore he was expected to return. The devilish mechanism was set ready to receive him. But the artist within him demanded that he should unmask the mystery with his own hands.

Moreover, he doubted if an official visit, even now, would yield any results. Old

Huang Chow was too cunning for that. If he was to learn how the man Cohen had died he must follow the same path to the bitter end. But there were men on duty around the house, and he believed that he had placed them so secretly as to deceive even this master of cunning with whom he was dealing.

He repeated his exploit, dropping with a dull thud upon the cushioned divan. Then having lain there listening awhile, he pressed the button of his torch and, standing up, crept across the room in the direction of the stairway.

Here he paused awhile, listening intently. The image of Lalá Huang arose before his mind's eye reproachfully, but he crushed the reproach and advanced until he stood beside the lacquered coffin.

He remembered where the key was hidden, and stooping he fumbled for awhile, and then found it. He was acutely conscious of an unnameable fear. He felt that he was watched, and yet was unwilling to believe it. The musty and unpleasant smell which he had noticed before became extremely perceptible.

He quietly sought for the hidden lock, and presently finding it, inserted the key, then paused awhile. He rested his torch upon the cushions of the divan where the light shone directly upon the coffin. Then having his automatic in his left hand he turned the key.

He had expected now to be able to raise the lid as he had seen Huang Chow do; but the result was far more surprising.

The lid, together with a second framework of fine netting, flew open with a resounding bang, and from the interior of the coffin uprose a most abominable stench.

Durham started back a step, and as he did so witnessed a sight which turned him sick with horror.

Out on to the edge of the coffin leapt the most gigantic spider which he had ever seen in his life! It had a body as big as a man's fist, jet black, with hairy legs like the legs of a crab and a span of a foot or more!

A moment it poised there, whilst he swayed, quite sick with horror. Then, unhesitatingly, it leapt for his face.

He groaned and fired, missed the horror, but diverted its leap, so that it fell with a sickening thud a yard behind him. He turned, staggering back towards the stair, and aware that a light had shone out from somewhere.

A door had been opened only a few yards from where he stood; and there, framed in the opening, was Lalá Huang, her eyes wide with terror and her gaze set upon him across the room.

"You!" she whispered. "You!"

'Go back!" he cried hoarsely. "Go back! Close the door. You don't understand—*close the door!*"

Her gaze set wildly upon him, Lalá staggered forward, stopped dead, looked down at her bare ankle and then, seeing the thing which had fastened upon her, uttered a piercing shriek which rang throughout the place.

At that moment the floor slid away beneath Durham, and he found himself falling—falling—and then battling for life in evil-smelling water, amidst absolute darkness.

Police whistles were skirling around the house of Huang Chow. As the hidden men came running into the court:

"You heard the shot!" cried the sergeant in charge. "I warned him not to go alone. Don't waste time on the door. One man stay on duty there; the rest of you follow me."

In a few moments, led by the sergeant, the party came dropping heavily through the skylight into the treasure house of Huang Chow, in which every lamp was now alight. A trap was open near the foot of the stairs, and from beneath it muffled cries proceeded. In this direction the sergeant headed. Craning over the trap:

"Hallo, Mr. Durham!" he called. "Mr. Durham!"

"Get a rope and a ladder," came a faint cry from below. "I can just touch bottom with my feet and keep my head above water, but the tide's coming in. Look to the girl, though, first. Look to the girl!"

The sergeant turned to where, stretched upon a tiger-skin before a half-open door, Lalá Huang lay, scantily clothed and white as death.

Upon one of her bare ankles was a discoloured mark.

As the sergeant and another of the men stooped over her, a moaning sound drew their attention to the stair, and there, bent and tottering slowly down, was old

Huang Chow, his eyes peering through the owl-like glasses vacantly across the room to where his daughter lay on the tiger-skin.

"Too late!" whispered the sergeant, upon one knee beside her. He looked blankly into the face of the other man. "She's dead!"

Two plain-clothes men were busy knotting together tapestries and pieces of rare stuff with which to draw Durham out of the pit; but at these old Huang Chow looked not at all, but gropingly crossed the room as if he saw imperfectly, or could not believe what he saw. At last he reached the side of the dead girl, stooped, touched her, laid a trembling yellow hand over her heart, and then stood up again, looking from face to face.

Ignoring the mingled activities about him, he crossed to the open coffin and began to fumble amongst the putrefying mass of bones and webbing which lay therein. Out from this he presently drew an iron coffer.

Carrying it across the room he opened the lid. It was full almost to the top with uncut gems of every variety—diamonds, rubies, sapphires, emeralds, topaz, amethysts, flashing greenly, redly, whitely. In handfuls he grasped them and sprinkled them upon the body of the dead girl.

"For you," he crooned brokenly in Chinese. "They were all for you!"

The extemporised rope had just been lowered to Durham, when:

"Heavens!" cried the sergeant. "What's that?"

He had seen the giant spider, the horror from Surinam, which the Chinaman had reared and fed to guard his treasure and to gratify his lust for the strange and cruel. The insect, like everything else in that house, was unusual; almost unique. It was one of the Black Soldier spiders, by some regarded as a native myth, but actually existing in Surinam and parts of Brazil. A member of the family *Mygale*, its sting was more quickly and certainly fatal than that of a rattle-snake. Its instinct was fearlessly to attack any creature, great or small, which disturbed it in its dark hiding-place.

Now, with feverish, horrible rapidity, it was racing up the tapestries on the other side of the room.

"Merciful heavens!" groaned the sergeant.

Snatching a revolver from his pocket he fired shot after shot. The third hit the thing but did not kill it. It dropped back upon the floor and began to crawl towards the coffin. The sergeant ran across and at close quarters shot it again.

Red blood oozed out from the hideous black body and began to form a deep stain upon the carpet.

When Durham, drenched but unhurt, was hauled back into the treasure house, he did not speak, but scrambled into the room and stood—pallid—staring dully at old Huang Chow.

Huang Chow, upon his knees beside his daughter, was engaged in sprinkling priceless jewels over her still body and murmuring in Chinese:

"For you; for you, Lalá They were all for you."

A Country Life

WE have a mighty pleasant garden and orchard, and a fine arbour under some tall shady limes, that form a kind of lofty dome, of which, as a native of the great city, you may perhaps catch a glimmering idea, if I name the cupola of St. Paul's. And then, on the other side of the house, there is a large space which we call a wilderness, and which I fancy would please you extremely. The ground is a dainty greensward; a brook runs sparkling through the middle, and there are two large fish-ponds at one end; both the ponds and the brook are surrounded by willows; and there are several shady walks under the trees, besides little knots of young willows interspersed at convenient distances.

This is the nursery of our lambs and calves, with whom I have the honour to be intimately acquainted. Here I generally spend the evening, and pay my respects to the setting sun, when the variety and the beauty of the prospect inspire a pleasure that I know not how to express. I am sometimes so transported with these intimate beauties, that I fancy I am like Adam in Paradise; and it is my only misfortune that I want an Eve, and have none but the birds of the air, and the beasts of the field, for my companions.

PHILIP DODDRIDGE.

The Little Boy Who Wished to Die

A Tragi-comedy with a very happy ending

By ARCADIE AVERTCHENKO

(*Specially translated for* THE ARGOSY *by Scotland Liddell*)

The work of Arcadie Avertchenko is in striking contrast to that of his contemporaries. There is no trace of slavonic gloom in this delightfully humorous little tale which is nevertheless typical of the Russian genius for realism. Avertchenko edited a leading Petrograd humorous journal and, during the revolution of 1918, worked with two pistols on his desk before escaping to Paris where he died.

"IN my lifetime," thought Mishka, "no one cares the very least for me, but to-night, when I am dead, they'll all cry very bitterly. If they had the least idea of my intentions, they'd go down on their bended knees and ask me to remain. They'd beg my pardon . . . But no! I've had too much to bear. Let Death come! I've had enough of all their orders and their punishments—because of an apple—a broken cup! Farewell! Think sometimes of the poor deceased! Remember poor Mishka! His life was not long—Alas! he was only eight years old!" . . .

Mishka's plan was the following: In his aunt's room there was a fire-screen. He would crawl behind it—and lie down there—and die. This resolution was unshakeable.

His life had been anything but rosy. Yesterday, for instance. he had had no jam because he had broken a cup, and to-day, simply because he had poured some perfume from a small gilt bottle, his mother had slapped him with such violence that he had flown five yards away. To be quite honest, she had not really struck him very hard, but it was so interesting to be a martyr that he had flown, driven by inner rather than by outer force, to the wardrobe and fallen there upon his back. He had remained in this position for a little while, then he had knocked his head against the wardrobe door.

"Let them knock me down!" he had thought.

This thought had aroused in him a deep sense of self-pity. The pity had changed to sobs, the sobs to shrill, hoarse cries.

"Don't pretend!" his mother had said, angrily. "Get out of here at once!"

Then she had taken him by the hand and dragged him to another room.

Now, Mishka was highly offended. For a long time he lay on the sofa and invented the most abominable and cruel punishments for his heartless parents.

For instance: The house would be on fire. His mother would rush into the street waving her arms despairingly and crying out, "My perfume! Save my gilt bottle of French scent!" Miska would know very well how to save the treasure, but would he do it? No! He would fold his arms across his breast and never budge! And he would laugh—yes, laugh!—coldly and scornfully. "Ha! Your perfume?" he would say. "Have you forgotten how you beat me when I took the very littlest drop of it?"

Or, again, he would find money in the street—a hundred roubles, say. If people got to hear of this, how they would fawn on him and flatter him in order that they might participate in his good luck! But again he would simply fold his arms on his breast and from time to time he would laugh his terrible, icy laugh . . .

Mishka had still another thought: What a wonderful thing it would be if he could always have a huge, ferocious animal with him—perhaps a panther or a leopard! As soon as anyone attempted to strike him—*Schwupp!*—the panther would leap at the enemy and tear him into little bits. But he himself, Mishka, would stand still and look on—cold and imperturbable as a rock . . .

Ah! something else!—Suppose he could grow spikes during the night! How wonderful to have spikes like a porcupine!

If people were kind to him, the spikes would be invisible, but if anyone lifted a hand against him—ah !—the spikes would bristle up and jag the hand on its descent. To-day, for instance, his mother would have been astonished, to say the least . . .

Yes, thought Mishka, he had been treated cruelly. And why ? For what reason ? He had been a good son. He had never gone into the nursery with only one shoe on, because, had he done that, his mother would have died.* He had never looked at his little sister from the head of the bed—lest she should squint.* In every way he had considered the welfare of his family. And now . . .

Of course, it would be very interesting to know what they would say when they discovered his dead body behind the screen. There would be an enormous fuss—no end of tears and sad regrets. His mother would rush up. " Let me come to him ! " she would cry. " It's all my fault ! I alone am to be blamed for his untimely death ! "

" Yes, my dear," his dead body would say, " but it's too late," and after these words, it, the body, would die for ever . . .

Mishka rose to his feet, pressed his hand upon his bursting heart, and softly crept along to his aunt's dusky room.

He crawled behind the fire-screen and sat down on the floor. At the same moment, he had the feeling that such a position would not be a convenient one for a dead person, so he lay down.

It was twilight. All was very quiet. The fire-screen had a nice, comfy smell of dust. From time to time he heard voices from the street. " Alexei Ivan'itch ! You scoundrel ! You've gone off with two pairs of shoes ! . . . Alexei Ivan'itch ! You thief ! Give me back one pair ! " . . .

" How they shout ! " said Mishka to himself. " If they only knew that a man lay dying here, they wouldn't kick up such a din."

Suddenly a thought passed through his head—the question, " Of what am I dying ? " There had to be some reason for his death. One did not die without a cause. Folks always died of some particular malady. He squeezed his little legs against his stomach. As an answer, it rumbled ominously.

" Ah ha ! " thought Mishka. " There we are !—Tuberculosis ! . . . Well, it's all the same to me. Tuberculosis ! "

*Russian superstitions.

Only one other thing remained to be settled. What would be the best position in which they would find the corpse ! It would have to be effective—picturesque. He remembered a picture he had seen in an illustrated magazine—the picture of a dead Cossack out on the Steppes. The Cossack lay on his back, his face upturned towards the sky, his arms and legs outstretched. The Cossack's head was slightly turned towards one side, the eyes were closed.

Very well. The position was already found.

Mishka lay on his back, stretched out his arms and legs, and then began to die.

II

HE was interrupted.

After a little while, he heard the sound of voices and approaching steps. The door opened and his Aunt Assia entered with Kondrat Grigorievitch, a young officer.

". . . but only for a moment," said his aunt, " then I'll have to turn you out."

" Nastassia Petrovna ! Ten minutes at least ! . . . It's very seldom that we meet, and then there's always someone else around. Truly, I'll go mad ! "

A cold shiver ran down Mishka's back. Kondrat Grigorievitch would go mad ! . . . That would be horrible. If he went mad, he'd run about the room and smash everything to pieces and roll on the floor and bite people in the legs ! And if the madman discovered him behind the fire-screen ? . . .

" Don't talk such nonsense," said Mishka's aunt, so calmly that Mishka was amazed. " Why on earth should you go mad ? "

" Ah ! Nastassia Petrovna, you're cruel and heartless ! "

(" Oho ! " thought Mishka. " She's cruel and heartless, is she ? It's a pity that you don't know how my mother's treated me.")

" Why am I cruel ? I don't think I'm cruel."

" You don't think so ? Yet you've done nothing but torment me during all these weeks and months ! "

(" Torment him ? How does she torment him ? " Mishka could not understand this. It was all so quiet. No noise, no groaning, no howls, none of the usual signs of tormenting.)

He looked out very cautiously. Not a

sign—nothing . . . His aunt was sitting quietly on a settee. The young officer was standing in front of her. He stood with bowed head, nervously twisting a little box on the table by his side.

"Now," thought Mishka, maliciously, remembering the tragedy of the gilt bottle, "just you let that box fall and you'll be sorry for yourself."

"So I torment you, do I?" asked Aunt Assia. "How? Tell me."

"How? Is it necessary to tell you that?"

Aunt Assia took the silver mirror that she wore on a long chain and began to swing it in the air so that the chain became a glittering circle.

("Hang it!" thought Mishka, "that's something I must try.")

Gradually his thoughts of death began to disappear. He had other plans now. He would take the little tin box of drawing-pins from his father's desk and put it on a string and swing it round his head. It would look better than his aunt's mirror.

Mishka was astonished that Kondrat Grigorievitch paid no attention to the mirror. He simply pressed his hands upon his breast and whispered, "Can't you guess?"

"No," answered the aunt, laying the mirror on her knees.

"I love you more than all the world!" he cried.

("Oho!" thought Mishka, terrified, "he is beginning to go mad!" . . .)

"I think of you by day and night! Your image is for ever before my eyes! Do you love me, darling? . . . Say something—only one word! I'll do anything for you. I will read your every desire from your eyes."

("What's that?" thought Mishka. "What does he want to do?")

"Tell me—Do you love me? . . . Only one word!"

"Yes," whispered Aunt Assia, and covered her eyes with her hands.

"Only me? . . . Only me?" said the officer. "Only me?"

Mishka lay in his dark corner and could not trust his own ears. "Only him?" he thought. "What about me—and father and mother—and my little sister?" This was something that he would never forget. Perhaps his aunt would come to him one day and try to kiss him . . .

"And now you must go," said his aunt, rising. "Besides, we've been here too long as it is."

"My darling" the officer cried, "I'd give my life for you!"

These words impressed Mishka deeply. He had always had a very great admiration for bravery and the officer's words produced a touching picture in his mind: Kondrat Grigorievitch on his knees in the market-place, his hands chained to his back. In front of him, walking up and down, the executioner, dressed in a blood-stained smock, his axe in hand. "Nastassia," the brave officer was saying, "at this moment I would sacrifice my life for you!"

Aunt Assia was sobbing. "All right . . . If you absolutely must, you can!" *Bump!* The head was already rolling on the ground, and the executioner was folding his arms on his breast and laughing scornfully . . .

"Ah!" said Aunt Assia, "to think that I shall be your wife!"

"How happy I shall be!" Kondrat replied. "Just think! We will be married . . . We will have children . ."

("H'm!" Mishka thought, "it's funny that my aunt has no children now." He was surprised that he had not thought of this before. "Mama has children, and the major's wife who lives upstairs has children, but Aunt Assia has not . . . Probably," thought Mishka, "it is necessary to have a husband for this—to feed them . . .")

"Now, sweetheart, you must go," Aunt Assia said.

"I am going—but, darling, kiss me once!'

"No, no! Not for anything!"

("This is silly," thought Mishka. "It's not difficult for her. She slobbers over my little sister all day long . . .")

"Just one kiss! I plead for just one kiss! . . . I'd give half my life for just one kiss!"

Mishka saw the officer take Aunt Assia in his arms and kiss her many times. At this sight he felt a little uncomfortable. "That's queer!" he thought. "Here are two grown-ups kissing each other like children." And he thought that it would be funny if he were to put his head out from behind the screen and ask in a deep, bass voice, "Hi! What d'you think you two are doing there?"

His aunt, however, had released herself and gone out from the room.

III

MISHKA, the little boy who once had wished to die, was quite alone again. He rose up to his feet and stretched

himself, and listened to the clatter of the teaspoons in another room.

" They are going to have tea," he thought. " They do not even call for me. Suppose I died of hunger here ? " . . .

" Mishka ! " came his mother's voice. " Mishka ! . . . Don't you want your tea?"

Mishka walked out through the corridor to the other room and took his place at table with a very sulky face. He did not look at his mother.

" Now," he thought, " she will beg my pardon."

" Where have you been, Mishka ? " she asked. " Sit down and have your tea."

" Oh, very well ! " thought Mishka. " If she's forgotten, so will I. After all, she's always clothed me and fed me . . ."

Mishka became thoughtful. Suddenly he said, " Mama, please kiss me ! "

" Kiss you, Mishka ? . . . Very well, dear."

His mother kissed him. Mishka shrugged his shoulders and went back to his place.

" What is there wonderful in that ? " he thought. " I can't understand . . . ' Half his life ! ' . . . It is simply ridiculous ! "

Chanticleer

ABOVE all, we cannot afford not to live in the present. He is blessed over all mortals who loses no moment of the passing life in remembering the past. Unless our philosophy hears the cock crow in every barn-yard within our horizon, it is belated. The sound commonly reminds us that we are growing rusty and antique in our employments and habits of thought. His philosophy comes down to a more recent time than ours. There is something suggested by it that is a newer testament—the gospel according to this moment. He has not fallen astern ; he has got up early and kept up early, and to be where he is is to be in season, in the foremost rank of time. It is an expression of the health and soundness of nature, a brag for all the world—healthiness as of a spring burst forth, a new fountain of the Muses, to celebrate this last instant of time. Where he lives no fugitive slave laws are passed. Who has not betrayed his master many times since last he heard that note ?

The merit of this bird's strain is in its freedom from all plaintiveness. The singer can easily move us to tears or to laughter, but where is he who can excite in us a pure morning joy ? When, in doleful dumps, breaking the awful stillness of our wooden sidewalk on a Sunday, or, perchance, a watcher in the house of mourning, I hear a cockerel crow far or near, I think to myself, " There is one of us well, at any rate "—and with a sudden gush return to my senses.

HENRY DAVID THOREAU.

Hymn to Pan

SING his praises that doth keep
Our flocks from harm,
Pan, the father of our sheep ;
And arm in arm
Tread we softly in a round,
Whilst the hollow neighbouring ground
Fills the music with her sound.

Pan, O great god Pan, to thee
Thus do we sing !
Thou who keep'st us chaste and free
As the young spring :
Ever be thy honour spoke
From that place the morn is broke
To that place day doth unyoke !

JOHN FLETCHER.

She Who Came Back

"After midnight visions are true"

By F. BRITTEN AUSTIN

THE clock upon the mantelpiece struck, discreetly, the hour of eleven in the night stillness of the study where old Henry Arkwright worked. He glanced up with busy, preoccupied brows to the dial, confirming his half-registered impression of the tale of strokes. Eleven o'clock! He would work for another two or three hours yet. He sucked cheerfully at his pipe as he signed the just-written counsel's opinion; folded the stiff, long documents, and tied them neatly with their original tape; took yet another legal case from the pile in front of him. He felt himself in form to-night, enjoyed the efficiency of his brain that worked so swiftly and surely in this solitude. The complete silence of the house was subtly grateful to him. He was immune from all disturbance. The servants had long since gone to bed. His concentration upon his task was unthreatened, the stores of legal knowledge held ready for his use in that practised brain of his unobscured by any concrete trivialities. Eleven o'clock—yes, he could put in another three hours' good work before, exhausted to-night as on all the other nights, he went slowly up the empty stairs to his empty bedroom. He adjusted himself to consideration of the affidavits he unfolded.

What was that? The faint ringing of the doorbell, far away in the servants' quarters but distinctly audible in this sleep-hushed house, persisted until it came to his full recognition. He looked up, puzzled, from the papers in the shaded light of his reading lamp, glanced around the book-lined study where the fire glow flickered redly in the absence of full illumination. Who could it be at this time of night? The far-away faint ringing continued, eloquent of an unrelaxed pressure upon the bell-push at the porch. He listened to it with exasperated annoyance, resentful of this interruption of his labours, trying to imagine an identity for this inconsiderately late visitor. Whoever it was, he himself would have to open the door. The servants were long ago asleep. They would not hear the bell. With a petulant exclamation, he rose from his desk, went out into the darkened hall.

Stimulated into haste in instinctive response to the determined urgency of the summons of that bell, its sound quite loud and definite out here, he fumbled hurriedly for the electric switch. Then, the lights full on, he went quickly to the door and opened it. A cold wind blew in upon him from the darkness into which he peered, seeing, at first, nothing. The ringing had ceased. A doubt of reality, a suspicion of hallucination, shot through him, was dispelled upon the instant. From the shadowed side of the porch a woman's form moved into the broad beam of light. A curious, inexplicable sudden consciousness of his own heart, vaguely not normal in its action, filled his breast as he stared out to her in a momentary suspense of recognition. Then she turned her face full upon him.

He started back, shocked to his inmost as though he had touched a live electric wire.

"Christine!" he gasped, in incredulous amazement. "Christine!—*You!—Come back?*"

The eyes in the woman's drawn face opened upon him as from a tight-shut agony, searched what was to her his dark, featureless silhouette in the illumination from the hall. Her whole soul seemed to yearn out to him in doubt and in desperate appeal. He saw her lips move before she spoke.

"Will you let me in?" she asked, humbly. "Harry!" She breathed his name as though she dared not pronounce it.

He felt himself turn dizzy under this unexpected emotional shock. He stared at her dumbly, the scathing phrases of indignant repudiation, so often mentally rehearsed for such a moment, eluding him. Christine! He could not at once adjust himself to her reality, looked at her again to make unmistakably sure. Christine—come back.

"Harry!" she breathed again, in timid humility.

He shuddered in a cold gust from the darkness as he stared at her. She was hatless, coatless, in that bitter wind. He saw her shiver as she half-ventured to stretch out a hand toward him.

A sudden impulse, as from a source superior to him—he thought it was pity—mastered the righteous indignation he had been trying to bring to utterance.

"Come in," he said thickly, and made way for her.

She entered. He shut the door behind her, turned to look at her as she stood in the full illumination of the hall. Once more her eyes had closed. Her lips were compressed as over an almost unendurable agony of the spirit. She swayed on her feet, arms limp by her sides, as though stayed from falling only by a supreme effort of the will. How old and haggard she looked!—the thought traversed him like a flash, linked itself to another—twenty-five years! What had happened to her in that twenty-five years? Little of good fortune, assuredly—with the professional eye that appraised a new witness in the box, he noted the poor, threadbare quality of her white dress, unadorned by any of the jewellery that had once been her delight.

The chilled blueness of her skin struck him as he scrutinised her. He touched her hand, automatically and impersonally, for confirmation of his impression.

"You're frozen!" he said. His accent of ill-humour rang oddly familiar in his own ears. It was the old annoyance at yet another of the impulsive follies so typical of her. "What are you thinking of, to come out like this?" he added, sharply. "Here!" He flung open the study door. "There's a fire here—sit down and warm yourself!" The tone of unsympathetic authority was—he remembered it—instinctively just the old tone he had so often used to her in that life now so remote as almost to seem a previous existence.

She opened her eyes again, the large emotional eyes that had not changed, looked at him, looked *into him*. Incredulity spread over her face.

"By your fire? Can you, Harry?—Can you, after everything—after all these years—can you still have me by your fire?"

Tears came up in those big eyes which looked so yearningly into his, and her mouth twisted itself into a pathetic little smile—the ghost of the smile that he had known in a younger face. He felt oddly uncomfortable.

"Come along!" He commanded her almost brutally, defending himself from any relaxation of hostility. "Come and warm yourself!" He lifted one of her hands and its chill struck to the centre of him. "Why have you no coat?—You must be mad!"

She smiled at him and did not answer. He drew her into the warm study, pulled a chair close to the fire for her, pressed her down into it. Then he turned to switch on the full lights.

She stopped him with a gesture.

"Please, Harry!—Just like this—in the firelight."

He obeyed and returned to her. Coldness seemed to emanate from her body as he came close. What sheer insanity! She must be chilled through and through, he thought.

He shrugged his shoulders to himself, disclaiming responsibility, and, for his own self-respect, played the host.

"Can I get you anything, Christine?" he asked, ungraciously. "Anything to eat or drink?"

She lifted her large eyes toward his face and shook her head slowly, without a word.

Baffled by her manner, he struck at what he thought to be the heart of the awkward situation.

"What do you want? What have you come for?" he demanded, harshly. "Money?"

She shook her head again and smiled.

"No, Harry. I want nothing, except just to be with you once again—for a little time."

A long sigh, from the depths of her bosom, escaped her as she turned her head down again to the fire and stared dreamily into its red recesses.

"Just to be with you," she repeated, softly, as to herself, "once more."

He stood over her, not knowing what to say. Silence filled the room.

She looked up at him, timidly.

"You're not pleased to see me, are you, Harry? You never wanted to see me again?"

He did not answer.

"Of course—how could you be?" she murmured to herself, gazing once more into the fire. "You never could forgive—never."

He forced himself to a politeness he felt to be magnanimous.

"I don't want to dwell on past injuries, Christine," he said, coldly. "I should be pleased to know that what you did brought happiness."

"Happiness!" she repeated, almost inaudibly, in ironic mockery, her gaze still fixed upon the fire.

Suddenly she looked round to him.

"Harry!" she said, impulsively. "Harry!" Her eyes went beyond him for a moment to the litter of papers on his desk, returned to him. "Harry! I know I am disturbing you"—the old pathetic smile came into her face—"but I want to ask you a favour"—she hesitated, as though her courage failed her—"the favour for which I came."

He hardened himself for a refusal.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I want you to give up your work for just one hour—I want you to sit by the fireside and talk to me. Won't you? Won't you put me first for just once—as—as I so wanted you to in the old days?" Her eyes, fine as ever, implored him in almost irresistible appeal. "I have dreamed of this for so long!" She went on as in a reverie, after a little pause, staring once more into the fire. "You never would, Harry—and perhaps—if you had——" she sighed. "You were so ambitious!"

¶

HE stood immobile, typically reluctant to break his habits. Those cases were important. He was coming to himself now, the effect of the first shock diminishing. Some of the old anger awoke in his heart as he looked down upon her. The old sense of disturbance returned. It was just like her to come and break up his night's work. And now—after all that had happened! He resented her presumption, stigmatised it as sheer callousness.

She looked up, feeling his thoughts, perhaps.

"Harry! Can't you—for just this once? I don't ask you to forgive."

Her eyes held him, enfeebled his resistance.

"I've got nothing to tell you, Christine," he said, gruffly. "Nothing. I didn't ask you to come back, but since you have come—well, I will not shut you out in the cold. You can sit by the fire if you like."

She smiled—the little ghost of her twenty-year-old smile upon that worn and middle-aged face. He clenched his teeth at it, at something in himself.

"Have you really nothing to say to me, Harry? Not a question to ask?"

He armed himself against the pathos of her appeal.

"No," he said curtly. "Nothing."

She shut her eyes as though under a blow. Then, with a tacit admission of its justice, she smiled up at him again. Evidently, her courage was held at high tension.

"I know I don't deserve it," she said. "I don't deserve to be sitting here again, after all these years. But, oh, Harry, you *could* be generous—once, at those rare times when I could really touch the real you as I so often longed to do. Are you still hard, Harry?—still so hard?" She sighed, wearily, turned her head hopelessly once more to the fire.

He watched the play of its glow over her features, was struck by her bad colour. The coldly observant part of him noted the fact that she was, or had been, ill. Half-starved, too, added this detached professional self. Suffering, physical and mental, was stamped upon her face. He acquiesced in it, grimly. Her frivolous wickedness—he remembered the callously jaunty tone of the note she had left for him—had met just retribution. He wondered what had happened to the man.

She looked up again, answering, with a subtle perception, the question in his mind.

"He's dead, Harry—dead years ago. Very dead. To me, he never really lived—not as you have lived, always, through every moment of my"—she paused—"my hell."

A sentiment of pity pricked him sharply. Poor little Christine!—she had certainly paid, and paid heavily. He repressed his commiseration, in alarm at himself. He must think—think sensibly. Did she intend to come back for good? He reacted violently against the idea. It was impossible. He would be a laughing-stock, the butt for the pointing fingers, the sly allusions, of his fellows in the Courts. His pride revolted. No, no—he must get her out again somehow, before the servants knew.

Once more she read his thought.

"No one shall know that I have come, Harry. It's just for this one hour and then I'll go again. But just for this one hour—Harry!" She stretched out her arms to him. "Be generous!"

He fenced stubbornly.

"What exactly do you want, Christine?"

She smiled at him, her face radiant.

"I want—I want just to pretend that it all never happened. I want, just once, to sit with you by the fireside as though I had been here all these years—as though you and I had learned to be the comrades I had dreamed we should be. I want to sit with you as we should have sat, both of us now growing old, looking back on all the beautiful things of our life together. Harry!" She lifted her arms to him again, yearning out to him. "Just once—just once to pretend—to be as we might have been—and then I can go away and really and truly die, satisfied. Be generous, Harry, be generous just this once if you never are again."

An obscure feeling stirred in him, a sense of tears that threatened as he looked down into the eyes that swam with moisture.

"You nearly broke my life, Christine," he said, with a hardly achieved attempt at harshness.

"I want to forget it," she answered. "To believe—for just one hour—that I made your life, as I wanted to help make it. Oh, Harry, Harry, I love you—I have always loved you, wherever I have been and whatever I have done—and I want to believe, oh, for just such a little minute, that my love was not really in vain. I just had to come!"

He pressed his hand over his eyes, did not answer.

She pointed to the comrade chair by the fireside.

"Harry—Harry, dear—sit down and talk to me as we ought to have been able to sit and talk—old married lovers with never a cloud between us."

"Oh — don't!" he said. "Don't, Christine!" He burst out with a sudden anger. "Why have you come back? I—I wanted to forget, forget always."

She reached for his hand, touched it with fingers that were still cold.

"And we are going to forget—going to forget it quite, for just a little hour, Harry, Harry darling!"

Her voice, on the old-remembered note of fondness, touched him with a strange power. Something crumbled in him.

He sat down suddenly in the indicated chair, stared into the fire.

"It's a bitter mockery, Christine!"

"No," she answered. "It's the real thing—for just once—the real thing."

They sat in silence for long moments while the clock ticked loudly. She stretched her hand out to him.

"Harry! Hold my hand in yours—like you used to do—in the old days before you married me. It will help so much. Can you remember it?—the old touch that used to thrill?"

He obeyed without a word, took her little palm between his two large hands, pressed it close. Its death-like coldness struck him and, in defiance of it, he emphasised his contact. With a sudden tenderness that was awkwardly unpractised, he endeavoured to instil a little of his own warmth into it. As he did so, he felt, as it were, a sluice gate open in him. A long-repressed sentimentality asserted itself, invaded his lonely soul like a flood. He looked at her. If only—his protective secondary personality, dominant for so many years, reacted jealously, perverted his regret—if only she could have understood him a little more!

It was she who spoke.

"I'm so proud of you, Harry—so proud of your success!"

He almost started—remembering how he had hoped that she would read his name in the newspapers, in a vindictive desire that she should regret what she had thrown away. He saw, suddenly, that it was only her opinion that had ever really mattered to him.

"My dear," he said, feeling himself a tolerant old man who could afford to be kind from his altitude, "perhaps if I had never known you, I should never have worked so hard."

She smiled at him as though there were no irony in his words, but only a beautiful truth.

"Harry—Harry darling!" she murmured. "I have helped—helped a little, haven't I? My love has been what you said it would be—the vital force on which you could always draw? Do you remember that, the night we were engaged?"

This cool assumption of a dream, utterly opposed to the facts, startled him. He looked at her and had not the heart to contradict. Suppose it had been so? Could he surrender himself to this make-believe which she was playing with an almost childish simplicity? It was suddenly very tempting to him.

"I remember, my dear—and I promised," his voice broke a little while he hesitated in self-reproach, "never—never to cut myself off from it—never to say the harsh

word which you warned me would freeze your sensitive little soul."

"And you never have, Harry," she murmured, softly. "You've always remembered—always been gentle and kind and loving—all these long years of happiness together."

His eyes felt sympathetically uncomfortable as he looked into hers, moist in the firelight.

"Twenty-seven years, dear," he said, caressingly, consciously defiant of the jealous self that watched. He had taken the plunge. "Twenty-seven years last week since we married."

She nodded her head in acquiescence.

"We've had our lifetime, Harry dear—and we have not wasted it, have we? Every year has been full, full to the brim, with sympathy and love." She sighed, gazing into the fire. "And that's the only thing in life that matters—the only thing. Success without love would have been very barren to you, wouldn't it, Harry?" Her eyes came round to him.

"Dead Sea fruit, my darling," the illusion was almost perfect to him, the irony without bitterness, scarcely perceived, "dust and ashes at the core." He smiled at her from a strangely sentimental self that was almost foreign to him and yet his own. "Christine, without you I should not really have lived."

She answered him with a movement of the fingers now warm between the hands still holding them.

"Nor I, Harry, without you. You and I were each other's Destiny."

He, too, nodded his head solemnly.

"Yes, dear," he agreed. "I believe that."

"And, thank God, we have not thwarted it, Harry. We have enjoyed it to the full."

He pressed her hand tightly for his only answer. Dream or reality, was it? He had almost lost the power to distinguish. He looked into her face, softly happy and somehow nobler and purer than he had ever known it, pressed her hand again in a vague necessity to substantiate the tangible actuality of her presence. It was really Christine sitting there, filling that usually empty chair, breathing with slight rise and fall of her bosom as she gazed into the fire. And if the other were a dream—the happy past that she called up in imagination—just an old man's dream, why he would allow himself, that sentimental self in him that none but himself had ever seen, the happiness of the illusion to the full. There was none to ridicule him for a childish make-believe, unworthy of his dignity.

"Christine," he said gently, "are you happy?"

She smiled at him upon her sigh.

"Very happy, dear."

Again there was a silence between them. Presently she looked up once more.

"It's splendid the way Phil is getting on, isn't it, dear?"

He glanced at her from his own dream, uncomprehending. She went on, as though discussing a subject thoroughly familiar.

"Do you remember we said we would call him Philip—our first boy—long before we had him? When we used to talk about him, in those first happy months of being together, it didn't seem possible that it could ever be really true, did it, dear? And yet there he is—twenty-four years old! It's difficult for me to think that I ever could have been his mother. When I look at him, so tall and big, it seems impossible that he could once have been my baby."

He stared at her. What was she talking of? They had never had a child. Then it came to him——

"Yes, dear. He's a fine chap."

She smiled at him gratefully.

"I think we were right to let him marry, don't you, dear? I know he's very young—but it's perhaps better than if he waited until he became set in his own habits and could no longer share the youthful high spirits of his dear little wife—as you very nearly waited too long, didn't you, dear? Another year or two of getting wrapped up in your own ambitions and you might have crushed all the young life out of me." Her tone was dreamily sincere.

"Don't, Christine!" he said, thickly. "I know a lot of it was my fault——"

"Ssh!" She soothed him with a gesture of her disengaged hand. "We're talking about Phil and his charming little wife. She's just the sort of girl I would have chosen for him, Harry. Young, sensible, pretty, with eyes that look you straight in the face—and she loves him, Harry, as I loved you, with all her young soul."

He made a little choking sound and pressed her hand—so warm and loving now!—with a convulsive tightness.

"And soon, Harry," she went on, "we shall be grandparents, you and I—looking forward beyond the next generation to the one after—*living forward*. Life is very wonderful, isn't it, dear, in its continuity?

Our little lives cease, but something of us goes on and on, in generations that we can't even imagine. Oh, it's very wonderful!" She sighed. "To think we might have missed it all, if we had not loved!"

"Christine!" He could scarcely speak. "You're torturing me!"

"Ssh!" she said. "It's all real—it's all real *now*. Everything else was a bad dream from which we have waked together."

"If only we could keep awake!" he said, pressing her hand in his as though he would never let it go.

She looked at him archly.

"You were always pessimistic, Harry, weren't you? Do you remember how you used to say we should never have the little girl for whom we longed, just because we longed for her so much? And now there's Jeanie! Jeanie, who'll be having her twenty-first birthday in a month or two! And you are proud of her, aren't you, Harry? Of course you are! We are both proud of such a daughter, just the daughter we imagined."

He closed his eyes.

"I remember—I remember how we used to talk of the daughter we were going to have. It seems very long ago, Christine, those first months of our life together."

She smiled.

"And there she is, all our dreams of her coming true, asleep upstairs and very likely herself dreaming of the woman's life that is opening before her. She's very real to you, isn't she, Harry?"

He forced himself to speech with an effort.

"Yes, dear. Go on."

"She's worth all the anxieties we had with her—the anxieties we never imagined. Do you remember, when she was a little golden-haired prattler, that awful time when she was ill? Do you remember how I nursed her, night and day—and how you would come tiptoe-ing to her tiny cot and look down upon it, praying with all your soul that she would not die? I think that was when you first began really to love her very much, Harry—when you thought you might lose her." She nodded her head in dreamy reminiscence, staring into the fire. "I remember how proud I was when you gave up your work for a day or two because you felt you could not leave the house while she was in danger. It was such a miracle for you to do that—like Joshua stopping the sun—and *all* because of our tiny little Jeanie. It made me love you, oh, ever so much more, Harry!"

"Go on!" he said, closing his eyes again. "Go on!"

"And then how proud of her you were while she was at school! She always had your brains, Harry, didn't she? Always she was at the top of her class. I remember"—she smiled—"I used to fear that she might grow too clever and wear spectacles. But there was just that bit of me—of the frivolous me—in her, wasn't there, Harry? And so just like her mother she grew up to like pretty frocks and look as charming in them as I used to want to look for you to admire me."

"Never so charming as you used to look, Christine, when you were twenty-one," he said, his eyes lighting up with a genuine memory. "No one could look prettier than you did."

Her warm fingers curled in his hard hands and her smile came up to him.

"Thank you, dear. It is nice of you not to forget."

He breathed a long sigh.

"For every day of twenty-five years, Christine, I have seen you as you used to look then." There was an emphasis in his subdued and deliberate enunciation that was eloquent of past agonies.

"It was the real Christine, Harry, that twenty-one-year-old Christine who was so proud to be your wife and knew herself to be so unworthy of you."

"No, no!" he said, hoarsely. "Not unworthy—I didn't understand then. If only I had understood—if I had not been so absorbed in the things I wanted to do—"

"Ssh!" she soothed him. "It was all very beautiful, our life together, Harry dear. Do you remember the holidays we had alone together? Do you remember Switzerland, and the great mountains that towered up behind our hotel, the snow upon their summits orange against deep blue in the first sunshine of the dawn? Do you remember how we used to wake up to look at them, and said it was just like the pictures, only more wonderful because we were actually there? Do you remember being among the great fields of narcissi, with blue gentian higher up, and reminding me that this was what you had promised to show me—those fields on fields of wild flowers which you had seen when you were a young student, years before? Do you remember the mountain stream with the big boulders where we ate sandwiches on a little

patch of turf between the rocks, and you kissed me just as those other people came down the path? I remember—I remember how I went hot all over and yet was very proud and happy, because it was the first time that any one else had ever seen you loving me. You used to pretend—do you remember?—to be a little cold and distant toward me when we were in company, your dignity much too big to admit that you were in love."

"Don't, Christine—don't!" he murmured, the breath of a soundless sob escaping him in a broken exhalation. "If only we had had them—those holidays we meant to have!"

"We did, dear," she pursued. "We did have them. They're all there—among our dreams. Look at them and you will see that they are true. The memory of them isn't spoilt by anything that was not just right. Can't you call them up again—the holidays we used to promise ourselves for the days when you were successful? Can't you see them? Can't you see that lovely time in Italy—the big blue lake, with the yellow houses and the red roofs close under the mountains and fairy islands in the middle? Can't you see Venice and the black gondola in which we sat, urged forward like a living thing over the still water in which the palaces were reflected? Can't you call back that wonderful night of silent peacefulness when, arms around each other, we leaned out over our balcony and listened to the gondoliers singing to each other under the stars? Don't you remember the bridge in Florence where you stopped and said: 'This is where Dante met Beatrice'—and we looked into each other's eyes and knew that we, too, were a Dante and Beatrice, born for each other's love? Don't you remember, dear? Can't you see them, all those wonderful years together, when you and I were young?"

"Christine, Christine!" he murmured. "If only they were true!"

"They are true, dear—they are true," she asserted. "They are the truest things we have—the dreams of our souls which they will dream again and again long after we have no body. And not only holidays—our life together had work in it, too, didn't it, dear?—hard and successful work. Do you remember the big case which made you famous?"

He nodded, with a smile of genuine reminiscence on his face.

"The Pembroke case?"

"Yes, dear," she continued, "the Pembroke case. Do you remember how hard you worked then?"

"By Jove, I do!" he agreed, with an emphatic little laugh. "I never worked so hard in my life."

"Do you remember how I used to sit by the fire here at night, not daring to make the slightest sound, while you worked at your desk, going through all those masses and masses of papers in readiness for the next day of the trial? Do you remember how sometimes you would look up, not saying a word, but just assuring yourself that I was still there, and going on with your work all the fresher because you saw me? Do you remember when at last, in the small hours, you finished for the night, you would come across and kiss me, oh, so quietly, and lay your head against me for comfort because you were so tired!"

¶

HE did not answer. His eyes stared into the fire, his lips thinned in a tight pressure against each other, as the mental picture of the fact came up in conflict with this ideality. They had been terrible, those nights of solitary work.

She continued, undeterred.

"And then, on the last day of the trial, when you had made that great speech—the first big speech of your career—and got your verdict, the night when all the newspapers were full of your triumph, do you remember your home-coming, dear?"

"By heaven, I do!" he interrupted, with a sudden outburst of bitterness. "I came home and looked around me—and wished that I were dead in the hopeless emptiness of it all!"

"No, dear, no!" she corrected him. "You came home and found me waiting for you in my prettiest dress and we had dinner together, just you and I alone, because the moment was so big that we couldn't possibly share it with anyone else. Do you remember how solemn we tried to be, you and I—you looking so dignified in your evening clothes and I just as dainty as I could be? And then suddenly you jumped up like a schoolboy and darted round the table to kiss me—and we kissed and laughed at ourselves, and kissed and laughed again, every time the servants went out of the room—a couple of happy children. And I loved

you so much because you were so very clever and yet could be such a boy. And then we got solemn again as the bigness of it all came over us—real, real success at last! The paths of all the world seemed open to us, didn't they, dear? And we drank to it, success and love! And then, quite close and looking into my eyes, you said the loveliest thing of all the lovely things you ever said to me—you said that your great success, the one success that really mattered to you, was that you had won my love, my real, real love that bound my soul to yours for ever. Oh, Harry, I would have died for you that night!"

She ceased and he was silent. The might-have-been came up before him with intolerable vividness. If one could but begin over again!

"And now," she gently moved the hand that all this time had lain in his as they crouched close together over the fire, "and now here we are—all the years of hard work, so successful that we need not worry any more, behind us—nothing really important to do except to sit hand in hand and dream over the happy past, an old Darby and Joan who have lived their lives——"

He jumped to his feet.

"Christine! Christine!" he cried. "Let us make it true! Let us forget—forget all the bad dream—go on again together just as if what you said were true!"

She looked up at him, a strange and awful fear coming into her eyes, the face that had gained colour going ashen once more.

"Oh, Harry!" she said, in a tone of infinite reproach. "You've broken it! You've let go my hand!"

He ignored this infantile remark, went straight to his point in the brutally overriding manner characteristic of him.

"Let us forget it, Christine, forget that you ever went away from me. I'll never remind you of it. We won't argue past responsibilities. We'll start afresh. Christine, I'm a lonely old man—I want you. I want you to sit by the fire with me, to talk over, if you like, the might-have-beens that we threw away, I as much as you. I want you, anyway. I can't bear loneliness any more—not now, after you have come back to me!"

She rose to her feet also, shivering, her eyes closing, biting at her lower lip as though in suppressed pain. She shook her head.

"No, Harry, not now. I—I must go away now, go back."

She turned and moved, with a curious detachment from him that reminded him somewhat of a sleep-walker, toward the door.

He jumped in front of her.

"You shall not go, Christine! You have come back—and you shall not go again!"

She opened anguished eyes at him.

"Harry," she said in a tone of profound melancholy, "you know you cannot keep me like that. Remember the last time you tried to hold me caged behind a closed door!"

He did remember—the day when, disapproving of some intended excursion, he had, in a cold passion, turned the key upon her—the day he had come back to find a broken lock and curt note. He had learned his lesson. He stood aside from her path, entreated instead of dictating.

"Stay with me, Christine! Stay with me!"

She shook her head.

"I cannot," she said. "I must go back. It was only for one little hour I came. We have had it, Harry, and I must go."

"But you will return? I shall see you again?"

She smiled a wan smile at him.

"Who knows, Harry?"

"Where are you going? Where do you live?"

"Please, Harry!—ask no questions. Let me go."

There was a dignity about her which silenced him. He opened the door for her and they went out into the hall. In a dazed preoccupation, he went up to the outer door and opened it to the night. Then he turned and perceived her coatless condition.

"Good heavens, Christine, you can't go out like that! Wait a minute. I'll lend you my fur coat. It's better than nothing."

He darted into the adjoining clothes lobby, returned with the garment. The hall was empty; the door still open. She had gone.

He ran out and down the drive after her, crying her name: "Christine! Christine!" There was no response, neither sound nor sign of her. She had vanished.

Bitterly disappointed, he returned to the house, closed the door behind him. As he went into the clothes lobby to replace the unneeded coat, he was startled by the telephone bell.

He hastened to the instrument, picked up the receiver.

"Hallo!—Yes—yes—what is it? Who are you?—*the police?*" He repeated the last word in a tone of bewilderment, listened.

"Yes," he replied. "Yes—Mrs. Christine Arkwright—yes—that is my wife—yes——"

The silence of the empty hall seemed to envelop him as he listened. He interjected an impatient exclamation.

"Yes!—you found a letter and traced me—yes!—Go on!—What is it all about?"

He frowned, contorted his face as though the distant voice was not clearly audible.

"What?—what do you say?—died suddenly?—I don't understand. Where was this?"

He nodded as though now receiving more intelligible information.

"No—I don't recognise the address at all! What sort of place is it?—Oh, a second-rate boarding house. Well, I think there must be some mistake—what?"

He listened again.

"No," he persisted, categorically, "I say I think there must be some mistake. You say that a Mrs. Christine Arkwright died suddenly in a second-rate boarding house—at that address I don't know—and you've traced me out—I quite understand all that. But I say I have good reason to think there is a mistake somewhere—it couldn't be—— What?"

He smiled with a grim superiority as he listened.

"What?—You say there's no doubt of the identity?"

His brows puckered suddenly in the frown with which he prepared the annihilation of a stupid and stubbornly insistent witness.

"Now, pay attention, my friend!—When did this event occur?" He asked the question in the tone of one confident of establishing an impossibility by a counter fact. There was a moment of pause—and then his expression changed. "To-night?—*At eleven o'clock?*"

The clock in the study struck, discreetly, twelve.

MEETING

MY Damon was the first to wake
  The gentle flame that cannot die;
My Damon is the last to take
  The faithful bosom's softest sigh:
The life between is nothing worth,
  O cast it from thy thought away!
Think of the day that gave it birth,
  And this its sweet returning day.

Buried be all that has been done,
  Or say that naught is done amiss;
For who the dangerous path can shun
  In such bewildering world as this?
But love can every fault forgive,
  Or with a tender look reprove;
And now let naught in memory live
  But that we meet, and that we love.

GEORGE CRABBE.

Barbary Sheep

By ROBERT HICHENS

The most vivid of this author's celebrated Eastern romances

Previous Chapters

SIR CLAUDE WYVERNE was a simple and rather heavy young Englishman, who had married a very frivolous wife, and who adored her. Lady Wyverne, to whom any degree of permanence seemed dull, was constantly demanding change. Realising her waywardness, Sir Claude decided to present himself in the seductive guise of change-giver.

One spring, Lady Wyverne suddenly expressed a wish to "run over" to Algiers, and Sir Claude readily assented. Passing through Paris, he was persuaded by Lady Wyverne to visit a fortune-teller there. Much against his wish he did so, and was warned that he was in "*danger d'une grand perte—la plus grande perte possible.*" Sir Claude, however, ridiculed this and thought no more about it.

Arriving at El-Akbara, they put up at an hotel and looked forward to exploring the desert. Sir Claude himself was agreeably surprised to find that his sporting instincts could be immediately gratified by the shooting of Barbary sheep, which abounded in the neighbouring hills.

Accordingly, deciding to rise early on the following day, Sir Claude retired to bed early. Lady Wyverne, however, remained up for awhile and entered into conversation with a young officer in the Spahis named Benchaâlal, who was the only other guest at the hotel. The interest that sprang up between these two was mutual, and there was an air of mystery about the young Spahi that Lady Wyverne found particularly attractive. Often, during the days that followed, while Sir Claude was out shooting, she found herself thinking of the Spahi.

One day, when Sir Claude had been out after Barbary sheep, he visited an inn at El-Alia, a near-by village, where he entered into conversation with the landlady, an old Frenchwoman, who warned him that Benchaâlal was a dangerous man where women were concerned. Instantly the Parisian fortune-teller's words came to his mind, and he thought with great anxiety of his wife, left with Benchaâlal at El-Akbara.

Summoning a guide, Sir Claude returned in great haste to El-Akbara. At dawn he passed Benchaâlal, who was calmly smoking a cigarette. He did not know that beneath the Spahi's great burnous was his wife, Lady Wyverne.

X

THE sun was up, bathing the desert in its beams, but the gorge of El-Akbara was still in shadow when Lady Wyverne, alone, stole along the road by the Judas-trees, passed through the gateway in the wooden fence, and entered the courtyard of the inn. She was very pale, and looked furtively around her, then upward swiftly to the window of her husband's bedroom. It was shut and the green persiennes hid the glass. She crossed the courtyard quickly and tried the front door. The handle of it seemed to her to turn almost of itself. She understood why when, as she pushed the door back, she saw Achmed standing in the aperture. He stared at her with his one eye, but said nothing, and she hurried past him softly, up the stairs, and into her bedroom.

She had dreaded finding Sir Claude there. But there was no one. She gently locked the door and sat down on the little chair by the bed.

Had her husband visited her room or not?

That was the vital question she was asking herself. He must have been terribly tired by his long ride across the desert and by the day's hunting. He must have been longing to sleep. Nevertheless, knowing him as she did, she felt almost certain that he would not have gone to bed without trying her door. And she had left it unlocked when she went out to see the sunrise with Benchaâlal. She had been reckless, feeling perfectly safe in the thought that Sir Claude was miles away.

Why had he come back?

Mechanically she began to undress. Her hands trembled, and she was not accustomed to undressing herself; but at last she was ready for bed, and she stepped in and drew the clothes up to her chin.

Why had he come back? It was his own idea to stay away all night. She had never suggested such a thing, had never even thought of it. When she had read the note telling her he was going to sleep out, she

had been full of a sort of ironical pity for his folly, for his shortsightedness.

And now he had come back, travelling through the night.

She could not understand it.

Presently, as she lay quietly there, and her husband did not come, and she heard no movement in his room, she began to think that perhaps in her terror she had been unreasonable. She had lost her head, or nearly lost it. But for the self-possession of the Spahi she would certainly have been discovered by her husband.

And if she had been discovered?

She tried to think of the situation calmly, without hysteria. If she had been discovered what would "Crumpet" have said, have done? If he knew anything now, what would he say or do?

She had always been accustomed to rule him. He had always given in to all her whims. They had often been foolish, but they had been innocent. She had flirted. Many men had made a sort of love to her. But it had been a very tame business. It had not been even a playing with fire. There had never been any fire to play with.

But where Benchaâlal was there was fire, there was always fire.

Sir Claude had never minded her little flirtations. But he had felt sure of her. Somehow Lady Wyverne, never having really cared a straw for any of the men who had admired her, had never dreamed that Sir Claude could mind their attentions, even their occasional ardour. The ardour had always been English, and her own consciousness of her own coldness had preserved her from either fear or any sense of guilt.

But now she was afraid, both of herself and of her husband. And she felt guilty, not because of any evil act that she had committed, but because of thoughts that had passed through her mind, of feelings that had stirred in her heart.

She knew her husband through and through, and she knew his intensely English nature. All, or nearly all, the prejudices of the average Englishman were his, cherished children of his not clever brain.

She divined how Sir Claude would inevitably think of Africans. Very much as the average American regards the nigger he would regard any African; whether Egyptian, Touareg, Kabyle, Arab, Negro, or Moor. They would be all the same to him—"blacks," or "damned blacks." Thus he would sum them up. The idea that his wife could enter into any close friendly relations with one of them, could flirt with one of them, could allow one of them openly to admire her, even to make love to her, would never occur to him. But if it were forced upon him; if it were proved to him that his wife had walked with an Arab at night, had allowed him to admire her, had admired him, found him interesting, even more — fascinating, strangely attractive! What then?

Suddenly Lady Wyverne saw her husband in a new light, saw unchained in him a new being. The Englishman is often slow to wake up, but when he does wake up he is not a man to trifle with. And Sir Claude was very primitive. At certain junctures in life the primitive man is the most dangerous, the most terrible of all men. He rushes ahead with the blindness of a machine.

Lady Wyverne shuddered in her bed.

But then she told herself that Sir Claude did not know. If he had known he would have come out of the hotel to seek her, or he would have been waiting in her room to denounce her.

But why had he come back?

His return made her think that he must have some suspicion, that something must have occurred to take his mind from Barbary sheep and to fix it upon a different subject.

She lay still for a long time. Presently she heard voices below. The Arab servants were about. Despite her closed shutters she realised that the sun-rays had reached the gorge. The day was come, the full day. And she must face it.

She looked at her watch. Eight o'clock. She got up, rang for hot water.

An Arab left it at her door with a loud single knock. When he had gone she opened the door and took it in. Her husband's door was shut. Was he in the hotel, or, having found her room empty, was he out seeking her?

She wondered. She longed vehemently to know.

When she was dressed she made a strong mental effort, opened the window, and stepped out on to the veranda. And as she did so her husband issued from his room and met her.

"Crumpet!" she cried out.

Her movement of surprise was natural. She was really surprised, startled. She caught hold of the balustrade and steadied herself.

"You are back?"

"Yes," he said.

"But you told me you were going to sleep out! Where was it? At some place or other where there's gazelle."

"I know. But the inn was so beastly that I came back."

"When?"

"I rode pretty near all night. I got in at dawn."

"I—didn't hear the mules."

She tried to speak naturally and believed that she succeeded. But her eyes were fastened on her husband's face with an intense scrutiny.

"You must have been sound asleep," he replied.

"Yes. I must have been sound asleep."

"Let's have breakfast," he said.

So he had not been to her room! For a moment her sense of relief was immense. She went nearer to him, intending to give him a kiss. But he happened to turn round just at that moment to look for one of the straw chairs they always sat in when they took breakfast or tea on the veranda. Evidently he had not noticed her movement. Or had he seen it and wished to——?

He found the chair, then leaned over the balustrade and shouted for breakfast.

"Are you tired?" Lady Wyverne said.

"Yes, a bit."

He tipped his chair back till two legs were off the floor, then let them drop, then tipped the chair back again.

"It was a longish ride."

"I—I wonder you didn't stay at the inn."

"It was beastly dirty."

She forced a laugh. Something in his manner made her uneasy. And then he had not kissed her. Nor had he once pronounced her name—Kitty. Generally it, or its abbreviation, "Kit," was for ever on his lips.

"I didn't know you were afraid of roughing it," she said.

"Well, I don't see the good of bein' uncomfortable when one can be comfortable."

There was a pause.

"No, of course not," she said.

He was still tipping the chair to and fro. The movement irritated her nerves. She looked away.

"Oh, here's breakfast!" she exclaimed.

The Arab who brought it was the same sleepy-looking boy who had accompanied Lady Wyverne on her excursion to the red village. He arranged the breakfast carefully and gently, but very slowly, upon the wicker tables. Sir Claude watched him with an air of acute irritability that was almost like active hatred.

"What's the matter?" asked his wife.

"These infernal blacks——" he began. "There! There! That'll do."

He suddenly leaned forward and pushed the boy roughly away from the table. The boy started, cast an angry look at him, and went off muttering to himself.

"I can't stand these fellers! Vermin!" said Sir Claude, with a sort of irrepressible passion.

Lady Wyverne said nothing. It was the first time her husband had ever behaved like this in her presence. She wondered whether he was only over-tired or whether there was another reason for his unusual conduct. His outburst against the Arabs made her tremble again at the thought of her imprudence. She felt that the knowledge that his wife had coquetted—to use no other word—with an Arab surreptitiously would let loose upon her a new man, a man whom she had never known and of whom she would be terrified. But he could know nothing. If he did he would have spoken, have acted at once. "Crumpet" might be violent, even terrible. She realised that now. But surely he could never be subtle.

And yet she could not quite rid herself of uneasiness, of doubt. He had not kissed her. He had not yet called her by her name. And there was surely something aloof in his manner, a detachment from her that was unusual.

"What about to-day?" she asked, making a strong effort to seem lively and cheerful. "Are we going on to Beni-Mora?"

He busied himself with an egg, carefully chipping the shell away from the white.

"D'you want to go?" he asked. "I wonder if this egg's fresh?"

"Oh, they always are here!"

"Dessay it's all right. D'you want to go?"

"Well, I"—she shot a glance at him—"I don't mind. But—haven't you had enough of Barbary sheep by this time?"

"If you're bored to death we'll go, but if not I think I should like to have just one more shot at somethin'."

He spoke very deliberately, with a certain dull heaviness.

"Yes, the egg's all right," he added, tasting it.

"Very well. But you're surely going to have a rest to-day."

"Yes. I may go out towards sunset."

"Is that a good time?"

"I may sleep out."

Lady Wyverne started.

"Well, but if you can't stand the inns!"

"I may take a tent. They've got one here."

"Oh—won't it be cold?"

"Take plenty of blankets and you're all right."

"Very well," she said.

After some minutes, during which he ate and she pretended to eat in silence, Sir Claude said:

"You're not bored, are you? You don't still want to get away?"

"I really don't care what I do," she replied, carelessly, "so long as we don't settle down here for ever."

"We won't do that," he said.

They had finished now, and he got up and lit a cigar. As he did so Benchaälal came out from the inn door underneath the veranda, walked slowly across the court and down the road towards the desert. He had on his scarlet cloak, which floated out majestically as he walked. He did not glance up at them. His dark face was very calm and tranquil, and he looked like a man perfectly contented with himself and all the world. Lady Wyverne only glanced at him, but Sir Claude watched him until he was lost to sight at a bend in the road.

"That's a fine-lookin' chap!" he said.

"I think the Arabs are a handsome set," Lady Wyverne answered.

"But he's the most strikin' of the lot. Don't you think so?"

"Is he? I dare say."

Instinctively she had replied evasively with an elaborate carelessness. Scarcely had she done so, however, when it occurred to her that it would have been more subtle, more really clever, to have agreed with him heartily. She was always accustomed to speak her thoughts, to express her whims frankly before Crumpet. She had often openly raved to him about other men's looks. It would have seemed far more natural, far more like herself, to do so now. But it was too late. Besides, she could not.

"I spoke to the feller this mornin'," resumed Sir Claude, leaning on the balustrade in an easy attitude and puffing wreaths of smoke away into the sun.

"This morning!" Lady Wyverne exclaimed, with a careful intonation of astonishment. "When?"

Sir Claude took his cigar from his mouth and smoothed the leaf at the end with his finger.

"When I was ridin' in."

"He—he was up already at that hour?"

She felt like an actress at a rehearsal, and wondered if she had got her tone just right.

"He was out in the desert, sittin' on a rock near the river. You know that rock where we heard that boy playin'—the first day."

"Oh yes. What an extraordinary man! What was he doing there? Meditating on eternity?"

She gave a little, high-pitched laugh.

"I don't know what he was doin'. He was just sittin' there wrapped up in one of those big cloaks. You know the things?"

"Yes—I know."

"We had a few words together. He seems a decent sort of chap."

At this moment a sudden impulse seized Lady Wyverne to tell her husband—not all, certainly not that, but something; that she had spoken to the Spahi, that they had strolled together up and down in front of the inn—once; something of that kind. She was in the dark. She could not divine whether Sir Claude knew or suspected something, or whether he was talking in complete ignorance. For once her husband was a puzzle to her, and she began to respect him. She began to respect him, but she longed to read him, to make sure. And she longed to "play for safety," ingeniously.

"Oh, I should think he must be quite well educated," she began. "He's an officer. At least, I think someone said so, didn't they?"

"Ah."

That was all Sir Claude said in reply, but it made Lady Wyverne abruptly aware that she could not tell him anything. It was impossible. He would never understand. She said to herself that he certainly knew nothing, suspected nothing. She would be a fool to "give herself away." Crumpet never saw anything unless it was shown to him. It was all right. Only her own stupid nerves had made her think that possibly, for once, he was being subtle, even crafty, with her, that he was playing with her, testing her.

"Well, what are you going to do this morning?" she exclaimed, briskly, getting up from her chair.

"I shall go down and see about the tent for to-night."

"Then you've quite decided now?"

"Yes," he said. "I've quite decided now."

"Very well. I'll go and write some letters."

She went away to her room. When she was there she heard her husband's heavy footstep descending the wooden staircase.

And she had an odd fancy that it sounded much heavier than usual.

But of course he was tired after being up all night.

All the morning Lady Wyverne wrote, or pretended to write, letters. She lunched alone. Sir Claude had gone up to his room to have a good sleep, and had given orders that he was not to be disturbed. In the afternoon she sat alone on the veranda reading a novel. She had not seen Benchaâlal again. But she had seen Achmed go down the road towards the villages. He returned about half-past one, and at half-past two Sir Claude emerged from his room dressed for hunting.

"Have you had a good sleep?" she asked.

"I'm all right," he replied. "As fit as a fiddle."

"Are you off already?"

"I believe so. If Achmed's got everythin' on to the mules."

"I must come down to see you start."

"Oh, don't you bother. You can see us from up here."

"What time will you be back to-morrow?"

"I don't know. Depends on the sport. I shall sleep out and go after the sheep at dawn."

"Good-bye, old boy," she said.

She put her face up suddenly to his and kissed him.

"Achmed!" he shouted out, harshly. "Are you ready?"

"Voilá! Voilá!" came a voice from below.

"Good-bye," Sir Claude said to his wife.

He turned and went down the stairs.

Two or three minutes later she saw him ride away with quite a little cavalcade of laden mules, and with three Arabs, including Achmed.

They went to the left, away from the desert.

Sir Claude and Achmed rode side by side behind the others.

They seemed to be talking together with some animation—doubtless about Barbary sheep.

XI

AMONG the palm-trees near the red village that day there had been a violent scene between Benchaâlal and Achmed. The guide was in the Spahi's pay, and had been promised a sum of money if he would persuade Sir Claude to spend a night at the salt mountain.

This sum of money Benchaâlal had refused to give him. The abrupt return of Sir Claude and the guide had infuriated the Spahi, despite his seeming composure during the interview by the river at dawn. He knew how delicately balanced are the emotions of such women as Lady Wyverne; creatures of caprice, highly strung, changeable, slaves of their nerves. Carefully, cleverly, he had been creating about her a certain atmosphere, in which he moved against a mysterious background of desert, strangely, almost magically, touched with the romance of a barbarous and brilliant world. He had scarcely seen her in the day. He had scarcely wished to see her. By night their acquaintance had been made, by night cemented. The towering rocks had cast upon their fugitive intercourse black shadows, the moonbeams a maze of silver. The river had sung to them a nocturne. The wind from the sands had touched them with its thrilling fingers.

And the Roumi-woman had been enticed.

At first she had been like a wilful child breaking bounds. But he had carried her on till the child in her, and its naughtiness, was merged in the very curious woman; and on again till the curious woman became the dreaming woman, the woman with wonder in her eyes. Just once he had shown himself in sunlight, almost meretriciously; with a crudeness of physical strength and determination, with a swiftness of skill, with a certain fierceness that was akin to the blinding sunshine. And then again he had stepped back into the darkness and called again out of the night.

And the Roumi-woman had been drawn on, like the child by the Celestial's pigtail in the story, and had come very near to the hidden chamber where the desire of her lay in wait.

Trampling upon this delicate fabric, which the Spahi had woven thread by thread, had come the hoofs of the mules.

And Benchaâlal cursed Achmed and refused to give him a sou of the promised money.

Lady Wyverne's terror was his foe. He felt sure of that. After the humiliation by the river's bank, when she had cowered for the first time in hiding, she would be set free from her dream. That was certain. Fantasy had been struck upon by the iron hammer of fact. And now the Spahi could not answer for the Roumi-woman.

So he was furious, and he let loose his fury upon Achmed as only an Arab can.

From their altercation Achmed had gone hot-foot to join Sir Claude on his camping-out expedition. Although not long before he had been livid with anger, half crazy with baffled greed, he was now apparently not merely calm but lively. He rode off beside his employer with a smiling face and, as Lady Wyverne had seen from the veranda, talking busily.

The love of money in an Arab is a passion of the heart, of the mind, of the whole being. Trick that love, disappoint that passion, and you rouse a demon that is curiously subtle, that is persistent and revengeful, and entirely without scruple. Benchaâlal knew that, but he had been careless in his fury. For a moment he had run mad. That moment had given Achmed over to Sir Claude.

Till they rode away together that afternoon Sir Claude and Achmed had remained coldly master and servant. The Arab had seen Benchaâlal's burnous move when they came upon him by the river, and had divined the truth. But he had said nothing, showed nothing. Whether Sir Claude had seen what he had seen he did not know. They had ridden on in silence to the inn. At the door Sir Claude had dismounted without words, and had gone straight upstairs. And Achmed had not followed him, but had remained below to watch for the return of the Spahi, for the return, perhaps, of another. And he had not waited in vain. When Lady Wyverne tried the door he had been there. Then he had gone to the stables, had thrown himself down and slept. Later Sir Claude had told him to prepare for a second nocturnal expedition. And now they were off.

Did his master know? He tried to read him with his one eye, as he talked of Barbary sheep. The hundred francs, spoken of near the salt mountain, must be in his pocket to-morrow, those and many others, enough to make him forget the lost money of the Spahi. His whole being was alive with determination to recoup himself. But when he looked at Sir Claude's hard face he knew he must be wary. For even the Englishman, who lets his women go unveiled, does not love to hear their names befouled by the lips of strangers.

"Look here, Achmed," said Sir Claude, presently. "I want you to take me up into the mountain above El-Akbara to-night. The whole place is one mass of rocks, and full of good hidin'-places to get a shot from."

"But m'sieu cannot shoot at night."

"I didn't say I could. But I want to have a look at the ground. Then I'll come back to the camp and sleep for a bit, and go up again towards dawn."

As he spoke he turned round on his mule and looked back at the mighty rocks that descended in giant steps to the road that led to the Sahara.

"You understand?" he added, turning round again.

"M'sieu wishes to go up there, near the gorge?"

Sir Claude looked sharply at the Arab.

"Yes," he said, after a slight hesitation.

"I do not know if there will be Barbary sheep up there."

"I intend to find out, anyway."

"I am the servant of m'sieu. I will do whatever m'sieu desires. M'sieu will be generous to me?"

Sir Claude gnawed his moustache, looking down sideways at the road. His pride, and something else, revolted against the idea of making the guide his confidant. But there was something alive and burning within him, something passionate, even furious, which seemed to be fighting his own nature and to be subduing it.

"I shall be generous to you," he said, at last, without looking at the Arab, "if you do exactly what I want—and don't talk."

Achmed put his finger to his lips.

"M'sieu has only to tell me," he said softly.

"I don't want those fellers to know where I'm goin' to-night," Sir Claude said. "I want the camp pitched a good way out, but so that I can get to the mountain at the left of the road on the edge of the desert, the mountain that rises out of the gorge, where all those rocks are."

"And when does m'sieu wish to be on the mountain?"

"I wish to be there towards sunset. I shall take some food with me in case I'm back late. But the camp must be pitched a long way off."

"And I am to come with m'sieu and guide him back?"

Sir Claude rode on for a minute or two without speaking. Then he answered:

"You can come with me and wait for me."

"Wait for m'sieu?"

"I'll settle where. That'll do."

¶

THEY rode on in silence. Achmed's brain was working and his heart was happy. He would get money after all. But he was full of curiosity. What was the Roumi going to do? What did he know or suspect?

Sir Claude did not tell him. Indeed, he sent Achmed on ahead, and rode alone till they had reached a desolate plateau surrounded by bare mountains, whose rocky crests were sharply defined against the clear sky, in which the moon hung like a ghostly thing as yet scarcely visible against the blue. Then Achmed pulled up and called out to him:

"M'sieu will sleep here. This is a good place from which to go out after the sheep."

"All right," said Sir Claude.

He swung himself off his mule, and walked up and down while the men put up the tent and picketed the beasts. He felt desperately lonely, almost as he had long years ago when he went to a public school for the first time, and cold—cold through all his body. Only his head was burning and his temples were throbbing. As he walked he stared at the mountains that encircled him, monstrous, cruel-looking shapes. He was not imaginative, but to-day they impressed him powerfully, almost terribly, and he remembered—again going back to his boyhood—how once as a child he had been left alone in the drawing-room on a dark, wet day, and had turned over the leaves of a great, red book which contained pictures of the circles of hell. In those pictures there were mountains like these, and hideous ravines guarded by rocks like gigantic teeth. And among the mountains and in the ravines the souls of the lost were imprisoned.

It seemed to him then that the little boy in the drawing-room had seen in the book prophetic pictures, and he shivered.

The Arabs began to sing as they worked. One of them wailed in a plaintive voice for two or three minutes. Then the others sang in chorus. Then the first voice wailed again alone.

Presently the tent was up, and Achmed came to him smiling and carrying the guns.

"I am ready, m'sieu."

"And the food?"

"What will m'sieu have?"

"Anythin'—bread and cheese and a bit of meat. But I'll have a drink before we start."

He went over to the tent and pulled the cork out of a bottle of brandy. Achmed gave him a glass. He half filled it, poured in some soda-water, and drank it off, while Achmed got the provisions. Then he poured more brandy into a large silver flask, put it into his pocket, and mounted a mule. Achmed was going to walk. They set off together and soon lost sight of the camp.

Achmed walked in front at first to show the way, but presently he dropped back and kept by the side of the mule. He wanted to talk, to satisfy his curiosity. He was not shy. No desert Arab is. But when he glanced up at Sir Claude an uneasiness took possession of him. The Roumi looked different, like a changed man, changed even in feature.

It was Sir Claude who spoke first.

"You know what I want," he said roughly. "I want you to take me to the mountain above the gorge, to a place from which I can get down among the rocks, get down as low as I like, right down if I wish to."

"M'sieu, it is not easy."

"That don't matter. Have you ever done it?"

"M'sieu, I can go wherever a goat can go. But I go with naked feet."

"Where you can get down, I can."

"I will show m'sieu a place. If m'sieu goes where I show him, m'sieu could get down to near the rock where Benchaâlal sat when we passed by this morning."

"That's it."

"If Benchaâlal should be there to-night, he would be surprised to see m'sieu."

There was a vicious sound in the Arab's soft voice.

"Why should Benchaâlal be there to-night?" said Sir Claude, fiercely. "What d'you mean?"

"Nothing, m'sieu. Only—only Benchaâlal often goes into the desert by night. But

m'sieu is in bed—m'sieu sleeps and does not see him go."

A deep flush of red went over Sir Claude's brown face. He realised in that moment that this Arab knew much more, certainly, than he did. And yet he knew enough, surely! He knew that when he returned to the inn his wife's room was empty. He knew that she crept back to the inn with a white, terrified face when the sun was up. He knew that when she said she must have been asleep when the mules came in from the desert she lied to him. All this he knew. But now a terrible curiosity was awake in him with a terrible anger, a terrible sense of wrong, and a terrible contempt. He had felt it all day, this desire to know more, but he had resisted it. And he had meant to resist it always. He had meant to—but now!

"Achmed," he said, staring straight before him between the mule's ears at the stony track.

"M'sieu!"

"Why should—why should Benchaâlal go into the desert at night alone? What does he go for? Has he friends in the village?"

"M'sieu, he has friends. But he does not go to the village."

Achmed was silent for a moment. Then he added slowly:

"And he does not go alone."

"Whom does he go with?" said Sir Claude after a pause of hesitation, and in an uncertain voice.

"But surely m'sieu knows?" Achmed said, innocently. "If anybody should know with whom Benchaâlal walks at night, it would be m'sieu."

"Answer my question, Achmed. It doesn't matter—what I know. You answer my question."

"Benchaâlal walks at night with madame."

"You're a damned liar!"

Achmed said nothing. But he withdrew a pace or two from the mule. He did not look angry. Being called a liar did not distress him at all. Every human being was a liar, he supposed. And why not? Still, he had told the truth this time. The Roumi was a fool not to believe him.

"D'you hear?" Sir Claude said, fiercely.

"I hear, m'sieu."

"I know all about you. Madame at the *auberge* told me."

"Madame at the salt mountain is a chamelle," Achmed answered viciously.

"If m'sieu believes such a woman, a woman whom every Arab——"

"That'll do. You needn't blackguard the woman."

"If m'sieu doubts my words I will not speak at all. But I always tell the truth. No Arab speaks the truth as I do. All the rest are liars. I alone speak the truth. Let m'sieu find out for himself. I say that madame walks with Benchaâlal at night. And why not? Who would not wish to see the moon upon the desert? Madame loves these things. M'sieu—no! Therefore m'sieu sleeps, and madame finds some one to accompany her! She cannot go alone, and Benchaâlal is not a poor Arab. He is an officer. So madame chooses Benchaâlal. It is very simple."

The last words of the Arab struck hard into Sir Claude's heart, as truth sometimes strikes like a well-aimed knife.

"Therefore m'sieu sleeps!" Yes, it was very simple. At that moment Sir Claude saw himself as the first and the last of fools. When a man has such a vision of himself, if he is really a man, the momentary crumbling of all his self-respect is succeeded by a desire that seems made of granite—the desire to reinstate himself upon his seat, his throne of manhood. At whatever cost he must do that, at whatever cost of suffering, of terror, even perhaps of crime.

"Where are we?"

Achmed stretched out his arm.

"M'sieu sees that rock there, to the south, shaped like a resting camel?"

"I see it."

"From that rock m'sieu can see the villages of El-Akbara."

Sir Claude pulled up the mule.

"I'll get down here."

He swung himself to the ground before Achmed could speak.

"Take the mule."

"M'sieu is not going alone?"

"Yes. You're to stay here and wait for me. Give me some of the food."

"But if m'sieu wishes to descend I must come with him to show the way."

"I didn't say I was going down. Give me the food."

He slung one of the guns over his shoulder.

"But I am responsible for m'sieu. When it gets dark——"

"Achmed," Sir Claude said, abruptly, "here's a hundred francs."

He drew out a note and put it into the guide's eager hand.

"If you attempt to follow me, you won't get another penny. If you stay here as I tell you, you'll get more. D'you understand?"

"And if—if m'sieu does not return?"

"Have you got a watch?"

"Yes, m'sieu."

"If by midnight I haven't come back, you can do what you like. You can come after me, or you can go to the camp. The food!"

The guide handed it to him in silence.

"Au revoir!"

"Au revoir, m'sieu! Bon voyage!"

He stood holding the mule, and watched Sir Claude walk away with long strides towards the mountain that was dominated by the mighty rock.

¶

SIR CLAUDE walked on till rocks hid him from Achmed's sight. Then he stopped for a moment and looked around him. The sun was already declining, and upon those mountains which were not within the circle of its final glories there was settling a strange greyness. Their naked flanks and treeless summits looked worn and weary, like a face lined with the travail of life. The lonely man drew a long breath as he looked at them. He was wondering, wondering at the thought of the joy that had come to him from these mountain fastnesses only a few hours before. Then he had revelled in their wildness, had been stirred by the thought of their remoteness from England. The blood in his veins had leaped in answer to the winds that blew over them, in answer to the sun that made their scattered crystals shine like jewels. An intense physical well-being had been generated within him by the African airs, the African desolation, by the freedom and the strangeness of this spacious, undressed country.

Now he felt a horror and a hatred of all that had rejoiced him. They had come to him with a horror and a hatred of the men whose native land this was.

Sir Claude that evening was like a man who has fallen into an abyss from a sunlit peak. His world, the world he had known and believed in, had suddenly vanished out of his sight. All familiar landmarks were gone. And the utterly incredulous man was turned into a man ready to be credulous of any abomination.

That the woman he had mentally set far above him should have done the unimaginable thing, should have allowed one of these brown men to—he ground his teeth together and went on towards that rock like a resting camel. He was confused. He walked in a nightmare.

Kitty's birth, bringing-up, life, tastes—all seemed to give the lie to the truth. Was she mad? Was she immeasureably corrupt? How had he never suspected it? Her caprices had been like the caprices of a child. And what was she?

He did not formulate to himself what she had possibly done. He did not mentally accuse her definitely of what everybody would acknowledge to be the last infamy. He stopped short of that because it seemed to him just then that what he was sure of was enough. For he was sure. Even without Achmed's words—and he believed them, he somehow knew that they were true—he was sure.

That morning, when he had reached the hotel, he had hurried up the stairs and gone at once to his wife's room. He had found it empty, and as he stood there staring at the bed, he knew a horrible thing, knew that he had expected to find it empty, had known almost that it would be empty.

It is very strange that sometimes, if we are close to a person, whom we cannot see and of whose presence we are not otherwise aware, but with whom we are very intimate, we feel that person is near us. Something, we know not what, tells us so. We may believe that we reject the subtle information, but do we ever really reject it?

Few people would have picked out Sir Claude Wyverne as a sensitive man. Nevertheless, in connection with his wife he could be very sensitive. That morning, as he sat on his mule face to face with the very composed African, who smiled at him half-sleepily, and sent pale-blue smoke out through his dilated nostrils, Sir Claude had felt suddenly as if his wife were near him. It was then that he had looked behind the Spahi, had made a movement as if to get off his mule. The Spahi had read him in that moment, had known that it was terribly critical. But he had kept his head. He had met Sir Claude's movement with absolute immobility, Sir Claude's strained, searching glance with eyes that held only a calm serenity. And he had stopped Sir Claude from carrying out his intention as certainly as if he had seized and bound him to his mule by the exercise of superior strength.

The African's calm had made Sir Claude realise then the probable madness of his own supposition. He had felt for the moment ashamed of himself and had ridden away. Nevertheless, directly he had gone, again had come to him the horrible feeling that Kitty had been near to him when he was near to Benchaâlal. In vain he combated this feeling. It remained with him all the way through the gorge and until he drew up before the inn door. Then he went upstairs and saw the empty room. And then it seemed to him that he knew—knew the incredible, the impossible.

Yet he did not go back to the Spahi. Kitty had thought that he could not be subtle; anything else, but not subtle. Yet even she did not know, did not divine all that there was in her husband, all that he might be, might do under unusual circumstances.

When he saw that empty bedroom a new man seemed suddenly to be born within Sir Claude, a man conceived in infinite travail. That new man was quiet, self-controlled. He stood for a moment very still. Then he turned and went to his bedroom and locked himself in. The green persiennes that were fastened over the French windows which opened on to the veranda prevented any one upon the veranda from looking into the bedroom, but permitted any person in the bedroom to see clearly into the world without. The windows were shut. Sir Claude opened them gently and stood still behind the persiennes. There he remained, waiting, motionless, with his hands hanging by his sides, and his eyes, bloodshot with fatigue, staring at the white road beyond the Judas-trees. And at last he saw coming along the white road a woman with a white face. He saw her look up at his windows with a glance of dreadful, searching anxiety. It seemed to him for a moment that he met her eyes, that they stared into his, that they knew he was there. Then she passed out of his sight, creeping across the pavement of the court. And then, presently, he heard behind him a soft and furtive step, like the step of a thief or a marauder, the creak of a door. She had come in, his wife. She was close to him. He heard her key turn in the lock.

And only then was he conscious that drops of sweat were rolling down his face.

He went over to the washstand and bathed his face. His big hands were trembling. They wanted to do something. He knew what they wanted to do. At that moment they longed to kill the woman they had so often caressed.

He looked down at them with a sort of dull wonder.

The wonder had never quite left him since then.

Now he walked on again slowly, mounting over the uneven ground towards the great rock from which he would be able to see the three villages of El-Akbara.

When he reached it the sun had gone down, but there was still some red in the western sky. He sat down upon the rock and looked over the desert. He meant to descend presently, but he must rest for a moment. He must think, or try to think.

He felt horribly tired both in body and in mind.

As he looked out upon the desert again the sense of utter loneliness, of immense desolation came over him. He fingered his gun mechanically as he sat there.

In the distance, among the great, tufted palm-trees, he saw thin trails of smoke rising from the African houses, tiny birds—they were doves, but he did not know it—circling about a brown minaret, that from this height looked black, some camels creeping along the road towards the south. Beside the camels little hooded men walked swiftly.

These hooded men were of the race of the Spahi, of the dark-blooded Oriental race.

A sort of sickness came upon Sir Claude. Kitty was bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh, yet now there was a gulf between them. He was on this, the hither side of it. She was upon the farther side, the side where the dark races swarmed beneath the torrid African sun. Secretly, in the night, while he slept the sleep of the fool, she had crossed the gulf.

He believed he hated her. And he kept on fingering his gun.

Yes, he hated her, and he had a right to hate her. He said that to himself dully.

There was not a living Englishman who would not condemn her. She had put herself out of court.

Even now he did not say to himself that she had committed the worst offence. It was not necessary to say that. He knew enough without that. For now he was sure that when he had spoken to Benchaâlal by the river she had been there. She had been

with the Arab, and when he, her husband, had come she had hidden from him.

That was enough. He wished he had killed her in her hiding-place.

The desert was growing darker. He got up from the rock and turned to go down to the gorge.

XII

BENCHAÂLAL sat cross-legged in a corner of the principal café maure of the brown village of El-Akbara. This café was situated on the high-road that led to the desert, and was opposite to the Arab cemetery—a quantity of upright stones fixed in the hard, sun-dried earth, without wall or fence to guard the homes of the dead from intruders. Outside the café was a sort of arbour made of reeds. In this squatted four or five Arabs playing dominoes. But within the café there was no one but the Spahi and the bare-legged attendant who served the coffee, which he took from a niche of earth in which glowed a fire of brushwood. Now and then an Arab passed across the space of the doorway. One or two even looked in and solemnly spoke a greeting to the Spahi. But he seemed to hear nothing, to see no one. With his eyes fixed upon the ground he sipped his coffee and smoked cigarette after cigarette, taking the tobacco from a long silver box which lay beside him, and rolling it swiftly and deftly in the thin slips of paper of which he always carried a large supply.

He was absorbed. His mind lay deep down in reverie. All trace of the fury which had convulsed him when he was with Achmed had died out of his face. He looked quite calm, almost sleepy. But his mind was fiercely alive. His passions were ablaze. And all the time that he sat motionless he was meditating activity.

Benchaâlal was swiftly intelligent without being what English people sometimes call "deep." Where his own dear interests were involved he was acute and quite without scruple. And though, perhaps, he could not have been subtle for a long time, could not have been very patient in any cleverness, he knew how to be both ingenious and secretive at a moment, as he had proved many times in his life. But he had the fault which spoils so much Arab diplomacy. When his passions were strong he was often carried away by them. His temper often pulled down the edifice built up by his craft. And when calm returned to him he looked upon the ruins.

Already he had realised the mistake he had made with Achmed.

The guide would surely go and betray him to the Roumi, to the big, blonde hunter of Barbary sheep, who went to bed ere the moon was up, and who left his pretty creature, his little squirrel of the woods, his rose of the garden, his Fatima with the eyes like turquoises, and the tiny hands like silver, to hear the Spahi's serenade, and to sit beside the Spahi by the river. Benchaâlal had a great contempt for the Roumi—the contempt of the cultured Mussulman for the uncultured Christian, than which there are few feelings more unmeasured, few feelings more profound. But he must take the Roumi into account, must reckon with him now that the great mistake was made and that the outburst of fury which had caused it was subsiding.

What would the Roumi do?

Benchaâlal had his own ideas about foreigners, gathered chiefly from his intercourse with the French in Algiers and during two visits which he had made to Paris. Of the English he knew but little. He knew them to be a great nation. He conceived of them as all very rich. He imagined them all dwelling in a northern land which was perpetually shrouded in heavy yellow clouds of great density called by them "Le fogge." The blood in such lands ran cold, he supposed. Without the sun, how could there be fire in men?

He knew very well what an Arab would do, or try to do, if he were told a story such as Achmed would surely tell the Roumi, had, perhaps, already told him. He would kill, or try to kill, the woman who had wronged his pride of possession and the man who had persuaded her. But the English were not like the Arabs. They let their women run loose. They let them talk and laugh with any man who came near. To an Arab the freedom of Western women is a perpetual source of amazement, and the situation of the Western man in regard to his women makes him an object of secret contempt among Orientals. This contempt, felt strongly by Benchaâlal, caused him to ponder now. Although he knew what he would do were he Sir Claude, he could not tell what Sir Claude would do.

He had looked into the Roumi's face on the river-bank. It had been stern, hard. The eyes were searching. It was a man's

face. That was certain. Yet this man had slept each night, leaving his woman to do what she would. And he had deserted her each day. Perhaps he did not care what happened.

Nothing had happened yet.

His mind left Sir Claude and went to Lady Wyverne. And here the Spahi was on surer ground. He had an instinct with women. Western men he did not understand thoroughly, despite his intercourse with the French. But he would have laughed to hear any one tell him that he could be long tricked or puzzled by a woman, that a woman could play with him, or read him while keeping the pages of her book closed from his eyes. For a moment he put aside Sir Claude and his possible actions, and concentrated himself upon the little squirrel of the woods, the rose of the garden.

Granted that Sir Claude did not interfere at once, granted that Lady Wyverne was not carried off to Beni-Mora, what would she do? What would she do now if left to herself?

Very deep grew Benchaâlal's reverie. For a while he even forgot to sip his coffee and roll a new cigarette. His eyes were fixed on the floor. His hands dropped down to his feet and held them loosely.

¶

PRESENTLY across the sunlit space of the doorway passed a strange figure clad in bright green with a green-and-red turban. It was the mad Marabout wandering to and fro, absorbed; led, perhaps, by some hallucination. Two, three times he passed and repassed before the door of the café unobserved by Benchaâlal. Then he came in under the arbour of reeds and stood still, peering into the shadowy room with his large, blue eyes, which were like the eyes of a distracted Christ. Benchaâlal did not look up. The Marabout stared at him, hesitated, moved a little away, then seemed to take courage, stepped furtively into the café, came towards Benchaâlal, and finally squatted down near him on the floor.

The attendant stared in grave surprise, for the madman never went beneath a roof, but seemed to have a passion for the sky and the air, and for years had always slept under the stars. After regarding the Marabout for a moment, he made a guttural sound in his throat and pointed towards the brass coffee-pot. The Marabout paid no attention. He was looking alternately at Benchaâlal and at the floor, with a flickering curiosity and uneasiness that were almost wholly animal. At length the Spahi glanced up and noticed his companion.

"Bring me another coffee, Ahmeda," he said to the attendant.

When it was brought he held it out to the Marabout, who accepted it furtively and began to sip, looking away with his head held on one side, like one performing an unusual action that he fears may be condemned if seen.

The Spahi began to roll a cigarette. When it was finished he put it into the Marabout's hand. Then he rolled one for himself and again seemed to sink into a reverie.

The Marabout smoked slowly and carefully, gazing at the smoke, as it curled away from his lips and evaporated, with an air of childish wonder. And presently Benchaâlal began to watch him. He remembered when this man had been sane, when he had been respected for his wealth. A visit to Beni-Mora had been his ruin. In the dusty, dancing street, with its wailing music, its gleaming lights, its small, white houses, he had met his fate in the girl from the south, Ayesha.

What a strange thing to go mad for a woman, to come to this! To sit with the Marabout was almost like sitting with an animal. Benchaâlal's mind ran on women and the havoc they cause, and he wondered whether he would ever be rewarded for the love of them as this man had been. For a moment the companionship of this poor creature almost moved him to a strange decision. What if he were to mount a horse, set his spurs to its flanks, and go out into the desert, go on and on with never a look behind, never a thought flung back to the Roumi-woman in the gorge. Like to like! He belonged to the desert and the desert to him. It was as the old woman of the *auberge* had said. The Arab changes not. Bring him back to the sand, and the veneer of Western civilisation drops from him. He casts it away. He forgets it. He drinks the fierce red soup. He puts his dark fingers to the cous-cous. He smokes the keef. And it is gone, the pretence and the dream of other lands. It is shrivelled by the sun, his sun, the sun that shines upon the great, bare world of Allah and of his Prophet.

The Marabout stirred, whimpered. His

cigarette was smoked out. He got up, balanced himself first on one bare foot, then on the other, cast a shifty, sidelong glance at Benchaâlal, and crept out of the café. The Spahi saw him walk straightforward in the sun until he reached the cemetery beyond the high-road. There he began to wander round and round among the stones that marked the graves, circling almost as a hungry pariah dog sometimes does when it seeks by night for carrion.

Benchaâlal wondered why he had come into the café. What had drawn him? He had surely shown a sort of sympathy, a sort of desire for companionship. Had his possessing thought of a woman gone out to Benchaâlal's thought of a woman? When he met Lady Wyverne in the gorge that night he had come up to her, he had stopped beside her, he had gazed upon her, almost as if he fancied she was his Ayesha.

Pif! The poor wretch was mad! Useless to think about him! Nevertheless, the Spahi's eyes followed his green robe as he circled—circled among the tombs in the glaring afternoon sun.

It was nearly sunset when Benchaâlal rose up, paid for his coffee, and went out on to the white road.

He did not know yet that the Roumi had gone hunting again in the mountains. Achmed had not told him. But now, on the road, he met the sleepy boy from the inn and he learned the news.

"They will be out all night, Benchaâlal Hamdan ben Mohammed," said the boy. "The Roumi has taken a tent to sleep in. They have gone towards the Tell, to the mountain of the dwellers in the rocks."

Benchaâlal listened in silence, looking very grave. This news surprised him, but he did not show any surprise.

"Is Achmed with the stranger, the Englishman?" he said, at length.

"Achmed is with him."

Benchaâlal said nothing more, but walked down the road slowly towards the gate of the Sahara.

So the Englishman had gone away again and had left his woman to do as she willed! Benchaâlal's astonishment deepened as he realised it. He thought about it carefully as he walked, and turned it over many times in his mind. Crafty as he was, he dismissed the idea that this departure was a trap. He could not help having an Arab's point of view, and it would have been absolutely impossible for an Arab who knew the truth to ride off into the mountains leaving his woman alone, even if he meant to come back and surprise her. He must have stayed. He must have acted quickly. His jealousy must have fulfilled its lust promptly, decisively, furiously.

Benchaâlal decided in his mind that the Roumi did not know anything yet. Despite his return in the night, he did not know. But surely Achmed would tell him!

The Spahi was now entering the gorge, and was close to the rock where Sir Claude had seen him when they spoke together. Near it, with his flute to his lips, sat the perpetual piper playing the perpetual tune. Benchaâlal glanced at him, then backward towards the desert. Not far off he saw the Marabout coming furtively along the road, following him. He stopped. The Marabout stopped, too, and looked uneasy, but did not retreat. Benchaâlal began really to wonder why the poor creature was intent upon him. Some strange idea must have dawned in his mind. Usually he loved solitude. He attached himself to no one. Many had striven to persuade him to enter their houses, had endeavoured to win some recognition, some affection from him, but always in vain. He accepted the food they put into his hand, but that was all. Directly he had it he fled, to eat it alone in some hidden corner of the rocks or some recess of the palm gardens. Had he conceived a crazy liking for the Spahi?

Benchaâlal waved his hand, called out to him. But the Marabout only tore at his fair beard, held his head on one side, and looked away. At last Benchaâlal desisted and walked on once more. The Marabout followed him to the entrance of the gorge, and there again stood still staring after him. When the Spahi disappeared he whimpered like an animal. Something seemed to be disturbing, even distressing him. He hesitated for some minutes, shifting from one naked foot to the other. Then at last, very furtively, like a creature seeking its lair, he left the road and vanished among the rocks, beneath the mountain from which, just then, Sir Claude was looking down upon the desert and the villages among the palms.

XIII

BENCHAÂLAL had already forgotten him. As the Spahi approached the inn his mind had gone to the woman within it,

and the fires smouldering within him began to blaze up once more.

Lady Wyverne and he had parted strangely by the river. He had been almost brutally imperious to her, recognising the necessity of recalling her to herself after the hysterical terror which had taken possession of her. And she had not resented his tone of authority at the time, but had obeyed him with a sort of quick meekness. She had washed her face in the river, had controlled her tears, and left him quietly, despite her dread of what might have happened in the inn.

But all that was many hours ago. Benchaâlal knew well that her mood had probably changed. The terror that had assailed her would have vanished with the departure of her husband on this fresh sporting expedition. And with the departure of terror there would be room in her mind and heart for other emotions.

These emotions might well be inimical to him.

At that thought a fierceness leaped up in the Spahi's heart, a fighting energy that was reckless. He forgot Sir Claude finally, dismissed him to the mountains and the Barbary sheep, to the hunting that was surely the only thing he cared for.

Another hunting engrossed the Spahi, the sport that was the passion of his life, the consuming passion, as it is of the lives of so many Arabs, taking precedence of all things, even of the pursuit of money. There was a woman to be conquered. She had nearly been conquered. So he told himself. Was she to escape now because of one contretemps brought about by the lack of ingenuity of the fool Achmed? His hot blood boiled at the thought.

As he came to the Judas-trees he did not see Lady Wyverne upon the veranda. The persiennes and the window of her room were open. He fancied he discerned a shadowy figure beyond them, and believed her to be there, perhaps watching for his return. He wondered whether she wished to meet or to avoid him. With difficulty he summoned patience to him. He knew it was quite useless to try to speak with her for some hours, and he went to his room and shut himself in till the bell rang for dinner. Then he came down majestically, in his wide linen trousers, his red jacket, his red gaiters, newly perfumed, his long eyes shining beneath his turban.

When he entered the dining-room it was occupied only by a young French couple, a painter and his wife, who had arrived that afternoon, and who stared at him with an interest which he did not return; although he bowed to them in the French manner as he came in, and sat down at his little table, placing himself so that he would be sitting sideways to Lady Wyverne if she came.

But perhaps she would not come.

He had hardly formed the words with his mind before he heard a gentle rustling upon the staircase, and she entered, carrying a book in her hand. Each evening hitherto she had worn a high white dress and a little black hat at dinner. To-night she wore the same hat with a black dress, that was evidently a day dress. As the Spahi very slightly bowed to her, as to a stranger, he wondered whether this change was caused by any motive, or emotion, discoverable by him. Now and then he glanced at her while she ate, trying to read her face. He thought it looked colder, harder than usual, even a little older. But that might be a fancy caused by his knowledge of what had happened to her that day. She did not stay till the end of dinner. After the first course of meat she got up quietly and went out. He heard her dress rustling as she ascended the stairs.

He lingered a long while at his table, taking his coffee there instead of outside under the veranda. The French painter and his wife disappeared, and he was left alone. He wondered what Lady Wyverne was doing, whether she had shut herself up in her room, had gone to bed, whether she would be out on the veranda. Surely she would give him a chance of speaking with her. If not, he meant to make one for himself. He waited till the household and the servants were safely at supper. Then he strolled out to the little court, and went to the place where he had stood on the evening of the Wyvernes' arrival, by the fence under the Judas-trees. He did not look up immediately, but took out the silver box and carefully rolled a cigarette. When he had put it between his lips and lit it, he glanced at the veranda.

She was not there, but he saw the gleam of light in her room, the window of which was open. And presently he saw her figure, like a black shadow, passing to and fro in the lit space. What was she doing? Packing perhaps, or getting ready to come out. He waited quietly. Presently he saw her figure no more. But the light still burned. He

had finished his cigarette. He threw the end of it away. Then he opened his mouth and began to sing, or whine, the curious Eastern song with which he had serenaded Lady Wyverne before he had ever spoken to her. It was a song about a Caïd who loved a dancer, and who gave her many presents, gold and silver bracelets, amulets and veils, a hedgehog's foot and a powder of hashish. Whenever she danced he was there to watch her, and at last he played upon the derbouka before all the city, and she danced to his tune. And when he had finished he gave her the derbouka to hang upon the wall of her little room as a token of her power.

It was a song of many verses, but at last it was ended.

The Spahi looked at the light, smoked another cigarette. Still she did not come. Then he sang the *chanson des vacances* of the children of the Zibans; and then he sang the song of the Great Mozabite whose love demanded as a marriage gift the head of Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet. The Mozabite murdered Ali in the mosque with a sabre, and since that time the Mozabites are hated by all the other Arabs. When he got to the last verse, the hatred verse, Benchaâlal raised his voice, lifting his head up.

In the silence that followed he heard the noise of the river rushing through the gorge. His blood was on fire, and there was a noise in his brain—or so he fancied—that seemed to be caused by the surging of this blood on fire through his veins and arteries. The motionless trees angered him. The white road, still and empty, angered him. The black rocks that frowned above the inn infuriated him as he stared up at them. Everything seemed still to watch his impotence, to observe the failure of his desires.

But as yet he could do nothing. He must wait until the landlord and his wife had gone to bed. Another hour and, if she had not come to him, he would go to her. He moved away from the fence and went out into the white road. There he strolled softly up and down, up and down. Above him the deep-purple sky began to grow bright with silver.

Surely she would come with the moon!

In her bedroom Lady Wyverne was sitting in a hard arm-chair which she had pulled away from the window. She had been putting some things into a trunk. She was devoured by a nervous restlessness which made it almost impossible for her to keep still, and the act of packing seemed to back up a resolution which she thought she had come to, the resolution to see Benchaâlal no more. She said to herself that her husband might leave her alone, or stay with her, might sleep or wake, be careless or watchful. It did not concern her any longer. She had done with her whim. For she had told herself it was a whim. The terror she had felt when she crouched down, hiding in the Spahi's cloak, had struck from her mind the caprice which had always dominated her. For she had only had a caprice for Benchaâlal. That she said to herself again and again. She would never risk her dignity more. It was over, this "bit of fun" in the desert, and thank goodness it had led to no evil consequences. For Crumpet could not know anything. His unexpected return must have been really due to the discomfort of the inn at the salt mountain. It must have been her own feeling of guilt which had made her imagine a strangeness in his manner, a certain coldness and reserve unusual in him. At the worst his suspicions must have been quite vague. It occurred to her that Achmed might have spoken, or, if he had not, might yet speak, tell what he knew. But why should he? She divined that he was in Benchaâlal's pay, though the Spahi had not told her so. She knew Achmed had been to the villages that day. No doubt he had seen Benchaâlal. No doubt Benchaâlal had made things "all right." She put away her fears, told herself that she had had a lucky escape, and resolved henceforward to have nothing to do with any strangeness that caught at her curiosity in Africa.

¶

SHE sat down in the hard arm-chair and took up a book. It was a French novel. As she looked at its first pages she seemed to hear the tap of high-heeled boots upon the *trottoirs* of Paris. Well, she adored Paris! It would be delicious to see it again, delicious to go to the shops, and——

Benchaâlal began to sing the whining song of the Caïd who loved the dancer and who played for her upon the derbouka.

Lady Wyverne's novel dropped down into her lap. She sat quite still, listening.

It was ugly; yes, it was quite ugly. That whining voice would have no success if it

sang in her world. That tune would be considered "too shockingly hideous." And yet it won upon her, it fascinated her, it made her regret that she was not free, free as a man is to follow his caprice, to investigate any mystery that appeals to him, to set his feet in any path that seems to lead to a land of promise.

It must be glorious to be perfectly free! Africa and its people had roused in Lady Wyverne a spirit of adventure which often lies dormant in those who are highly capricious, and this spirit of adventure extended its arms to the Spahi, as to a magician who could give it what it longed for.

Benchaâlal's voice died away, ending in the air, like a thing thrown up towards the stars.

Lady Wyverne took up her book again. But all the fascination of Paris had evaporated from its pages, which now seemed arid and hard as the pavements which echoed with high heels. She thought of naked brown feet treading softly in African slippers.

Again Benchaâlal sang.

She knew quite well why he was singing. It was his summons to her to come out to him. And she was not going to obey. She was soon going to shut the persiennes, undress, put out the light, get into bed. She looked at the bed. It was intended to be slept in. And she would not sleep. How utterly impossible it would be to sleep!

The *chanson des vacances* did not sound very gay to her ears. She did not know what it meant, but fancied it a song of the sadness of the desert. As she listened to it she thought of the morrow. Certainly they would go away on the morrow. Once more she would be isolated with Crumpet. Her intercourse with the Spahi had opened her eyes thoroughly to the nullity of Crumpet—except when he was angry. She felt certain that if he were really roused to anger, her husband could be impressive, even terrible. But otherwise——! There was something tragic in possessing a husband who could only be interesting when he was furious.

Benchaâlal was always interesting, and she had never seen him furious. Now he sang the song of the Mozabite who murdered the Prophet's son-in-law in the mosque. The hatred verse sounded quite loudly in her ears. Then there was silence. She listened. She expected another song. But the silence prolonged itself, and presently she felt sure that the Spahi had understood that his summons was in vain.

Had he gone away?

She longed to know, but she did not move from her chair, and presently she took up her novel again. But the restlessness in her increased, and she found it almost impossible to remain still. Reading about Paris had made her mind go back to the day when she had visited the astrologer with her husband. She recalled his written words. He had foreseen that her husband would be in danger of losing her—for so she interpreted the "grande perte." He would be in danger of losing her, but had he ever really possessed her? Had any one? And she, could she ever give herself utterly, with complete abnegation to any one? She did not know. But she knew that the Spahi had had more empire over her than any other man had ever gained. She deliberately thought of this empire as at an end. He had begun to dominate her. But for this fright, which had awakened her sharply to a sense of the true value of events, he might have increased his dominion. Something of the spirit of the slave had certainly entered into her while with this man, who perhaps had wives who were little more than slaves. It was odd that as she now sat thinking of this subjection of her will and spirit to his, she did not feel angry or even greatly humbled. Rather she was conscious of missing a pleasure which she desired to enjoy once more.

She sighed again and looked at the bed. It was certainly impossible that she could sleep. She wondered where her husband was; probably stretched on a camp-bed under the shadow of his tent, snoring. Mountains surrounded him, she supposed. And at dawn he would be out with his gun.

And if Achmed had told him!

But Achmed's lips were closed by the Spahi's money. She felt sure of that. She knew that she ought also to feel indignant about it. Perhaps, in another land, she would have felt indignant. But such enterprises seemed to her—not unnatural, certainly, not even very culpable, here.

By the river, as she crouched beneath Benchaâlal's cloak, she had felt humiliated. But this sensation of shame had mysteriously left her with the terror that had been its companion.

And yet she certainly did not love this man. She did not love him, yet she felt a strong inclination to follow him and to

obey him. It was as if he held in his hand a thin cord to which she was attached, and whenever he pulled, however gently, at this cord she felt that she must move in the direction he desired.

Even now he was pulling at the cord, somewhere outside in the night. She was conscious of the subtle tug-tug.

If only he were not there, and she could go out upon the veranda and see the night and breathe the air from the desert! She felt imprisoned in this little room. It seemed to her that the atmosphere within it was suffocating.

She had packed her things in readiness for the morrow's departure, and was wearing a travelling dress, as the Spahi had noticed. It was insufferably tight and thick, and now, unable to be still, she got up, went to her trunk, and took out a dress of a thinner material and dark red in colour. She had not worn it in El-Akbara. Quickly she exchanged the travelling dress for it. Then she looked into the glass. She was surprised by the excited expression on her face. Her shining eyes were full of anticipation. This red gown looked unfinished without any jewels. She had a small jewel-case in her dressing-bag. She opened it, took out a long diamond chain, and hung it round her neck.

She had heard that the Arabs delight in jewels and in all sparkling things, that their women are covered with gold coins and precious amulets. A great wish came to her that the Spahi might see her once, for a moment, in this red gown and with these diamonds. It was the desire of a coquette. After to-morrow they would probably never meet again. No doubt he would quickly forget all about her. She felt as if she would like to leave a last impression that would efface his remembrance of her, sobbing, tear-stained, and—obedient.

She sighed, standing still and holding the diamond chain lightly with her two hands.

Then she did what she had resolved not to do. She stepped out on to the veranda.

It was already late; or so the Frenchman who kept the inn thought. He and his wife and the servants had gone to bed. Deep silence reigned over this cloistered world on the edge of the world of freedom, silence broken only by the voice of the river. And that voice, enclosed in this exquisite casket of silence, seemed influenced by it, seemed to be refined, softened to a tenderness that was pathetic, that was almost yearning. The moon was coming up, thrusting its golden rim above the ebony silhouette of a great rock.

Lady Wyverne watched it almost breathlessly, as it rose with a mysterious steadiness, till its full circle was released from the fierce and dramatic shadow and was at liberty in the serene and starry sky.

That prisoner at least was free.

She looked across the court at the dark trees and at the road beyond. No one was upon it. She looked away to the dim shapes of the mountains. Her husband was somewhere among them. With the coming of the deep night a slight uneasiness that had been lurking in the under part of her mind had disappeared. Sir Claude was certainly away irrevocably.

And Benchaâlal?

A shadowy figure stole down the road, going towards the desert. It passed before she had had time to look at it closely, and disappeared into the moonlight. That it was an Arab she had seen. But that was all. The figure had seemed to be running. It fled as quickly, as silently as a shadow over a white sheet.

Lady Wyverne was startled and held her breath for a moment. She even turned half round to the lighted room behind her, moved by a sudden feeling that there was danger in this solitude, that she had better go in from the veranda, close the persiennes, and forget the strange magic without. But as she turned she again heard the Spahi singing, only just heard him. The voice was almost a murmur, and she could not tell where it came from. But she knew that he was waiting, that he had seen her, that he was calling her.

Once again, as so many times in her life, the hands, the light but wilfully obstinate hands of caprice took hold of her. And she was so afraid of resisting them—knowing that to-night there was alive within her a something that was cautious, that was even afraid—that she yielded abruptly to their guidance. Without pausing to catch up a cloak, she went softly out of her room down the dark staircase, and out into the courtyard.

XIV

BENCHAÂLAL, who was beneath the veranda, smiled when he saw Lady Wyverne come into the court and look swiftly round her. For a moment he did not move, but watched the little, slight

figure in its red dress, the sparkle of the thin chain of diamonds in the moonlight. How dainty and elfin she looked, how different from the terrified woman by the river! She crossed the court, going towards the Judas-trees. He came out and joined her.

When she saw him she said, in a low voice:

"Did you see that man go past?"

"Madame?"

"Just now, a man—running! He went that way."

She pointed towards the mouth of the gorge.

"I saw no one, madame. But I was not thinking of men on the road. Was it an Arab?"

"Yes."

"Let us follow him."

"No. I have come down to say good-bye. We go to-morrow. I have been very silly here and I am very glad to go."

She stood looking at him. Again her hands had gone up to the chain of diamonds and held it lightly.

Benchaâlal loved jewels, and all things that glittered and shone. His Oriental imagination was stirred by them. They roused his senses, too, as perfume did, and music and bright colours. Their fierceness called to the fierceness in him. It was not very wise of Lady Wyverne to have put them on that night. She saw his eyes go to them and stay with them for an instant, then look at her with a glance that was bright like steel.

"Let us walk through the gorge for the last time," he said.

She shook her head.

"After this morning—no! I had a fright, a lesson!"

She spoke in her most airy, most petulantly childish way, trying to abolish from his mind the memory of her hysterical collapse.

"A lesson from your husband?"

"Well—yes."

"And he is giving you another lesson to-night, madame. Will you never learn the meaning of Barbary sheep?"

As he finished he glanced nervously at the hotel, as if he suspected that they were being watched, overheard. In reply to his glance she said:

"Well, just beyond the trees, then?"

He held open the gate for her. They passed out and went a few steps down the road.

"You don't understand Englishmen," she said.

"Mon Dieu! How can I?" He shrugged his shoulders and lifted his slim hands. "We get our blood warmed each day by the sun, madame, we Arabs. How can we understand?"

His eyes were again on her jewels. They spoke to him in the moonbeams. Each diamond, when it glittered, had a voice.

"You think——?"

She hesitated. She knew what he was thinking, that her husband cared nothing for her, that his soul was wrapped up in the love of sport. It seemed as if it were so. But she knew that it was not. She knew, and yet so subtle was this man's influence upon her that now he sent to her his doubt—if it were doubt and not pretence of doubt.

He moved on a few steps very quietly, and she went with him as if unconsciously.

"Madame, I think that what woman chooses not to see she does not see, that what woman chooses not to realise she does not realise. Am I wrong? I am only an Arab. I cannot know. I can only hazard. I can only guess."

Humility from a man with eyes like his, eyes sparkling with intelligence, keen and searching, almost cunning, came absurdly.

"Only an Arab!" exclaimed Lady Wyverne.

She could not think of these dark men as her husband did. To her they seemed subtle as women, imbued with a strange femininity despite their fierceness.

"You—doubtless you think we are barbarians?"

She looked up at him. At that moment she knew that it was the barbarian in him which attracted her, or at least the barbarous strain in him which was combined with something else.

"You are afraid of us, perhaps?" he added. "You think we are capable of everything?" He used the French expression, *capable de tout*. "Is it not so?"

"I—I think you might be."

They were still walking onward towards the gate of the desert. The voice of the river was in their ears, the silver of the moonbeams was about them. Benchaâlal's eyes went continually to the flashing fires of the diamonds that hung down to his companion's waist.

"And is it not better so? What is a man if he is not capable of all, when he feels all,

(*Continued on page* 146.)

WHEN YOU ARE FEELING OUT OF SORTS.
DON'T TRY TO KICK THE CAT

OR PUSH POLICEMEN OFF THE PATH
- AND SILLY THINGS LIKE THAT.

- WHEN YOU'VE NO APPETITE FOR FOOD.
DON'T SIMPLY SIT AND GROUSE

YOU'LL ONLY SPREAD YOUR DISCONTENT
TO OTHERS IN THE HOUSE —

AND WHEN YOUR HEAD IS ACHING SO —
YOU THINK IT'S GOING TO SPLIT;
YOU CANNOT BE EXPECTED
TO FEEL GAY—WE MUST ADMIT.

BUT IF YOU WISH TO RID YOURSELF
OF THESE DISTRESSING ILLS;
THE REMEDY IS SIMPLE, SIR —
YOU MUST TAKE BEECHAM'S PILLS

Beecham's Pills

when he desires all? Would you have his manners tame, his words slow, his face calm, when his heart is on fire, when his nature is calling, when his blood is crying out, crying out like the river there as it rushes towards the desert? It wants its freedom, and the man wants his; wants the liberty to be as he really is, to act no more, but to hate and to love as his blood tells him. The Englishman! He does not want all this. What does he want? Barbary sheep, Mon Dieu! Barbary sheep!" He laughed low, as if to himself. "Well, then, in the name of Allah and of his Prophet, let the Englishman have his Barbary sheep, but let the Arab have"—he stopped, then he added slowly—"his desire, the desire of his life."

Lady Wyverne felt as if his words were gusts of heat from a furnace coming to her fiercely. She knew that she did not really care for the Spahi, yet whenever she was with him he forced her, as it were, into his atmosphere. Some men have this power. They spread a magic carpet. They carry you away, out of your window, over the tree-tops, over the seas, far off to the strange lands where the voices are strange and the flowers strange, and you lose your identity and become as the strange people are.

Again Lady Wyverne smelt the perfume that emanated from his garments. She stopped.

"Where are we going?" she said. "I told you I would not walk with you to-night."

"Madame, it is the last time. To-morrow you go, and I—I go on my three days' journey into the desert. You will never come there. You will take the train to-morrow. You will go back to England. It is good-bye."

"Yes, it is good-bye."

Again she felt tempted. A longing to taste, just to taste, the mysterious African life assailed her, and her own existence presented itself to her as ineffably commonplace, insufferably empty. It was safe, yes, protected, but it was frightfully tame. Again she was the child tempted by the Celestial's pigtail.

"I know; but——"

"You must at least say good-bye to the desert, madame."

"But—what do you mean? We are not going to England to-morrow. We are going on to Beni-Mora to-morrow."

Benchaâlal said nothing. He looked at her in silence, but in his eyes there seemed to be a sort of ironical pity and surprise.

"Why—why do you look at me like that?" she said.

"But—madame does not know?"

"Know what?"

"That m'sieu turns his back on the desert?"

"I know nothing. I don't understand."

"Then I had better be silent. Madame will know to-morrow."

"Tell me now. Tell me at once."

"To-day—did you not notice anything strange in m'sieu's manner to-day?" said Benchaâlal, drawing a bow at a venture, very craftily.

"Yes, I—what did it mean?"

"That m'sieu is tired of Africa, that to-morrow he turns his back to the desert. In Beni-Mora there are no Barbary sheep. Therefore, m'sieu will not go to Beni-Mora."

"How do you know this?"

"But all at the hotel knows it, the patron, the Arabs, every one. Perhaps not madame! The wise man acts quickly, without speech, when he acts against his wife's desire. Madame will know. To-morrow she will know, when she steps into the train that goes to Tunis!"

"Then—then I shall never see the real desert."

¶

A BITTER sense of disappointment, almost of outrage, swept over Lady Wyverne. All the wilfulness, which had ruled so long, seemed to start up, like a wild creature at the touch of a whip. She believed what Benchaâlal said. He spoke with an air of almost surprised sincerity that convinced her at once that he was speaking the truth. She grew hot with anger. This was why her husband's manner had been strange, furtive with her in the morning upon the veranda. This was why he had tried to avoid her kiss. He had had his sport, his pleasure, and now he was going to take her away. She was to yield to his convenience.

Patches of red came out on her delicate cheeks and her eyes shone. Without saying another word she walked on again.

And as she walked she thought that her desire of the desert had increased. Now that she was not to know the desert, it seemed to her that it was the one thing which she longed to know.

Benchaâlal kept close beside her as the

(Continued on page 148.)

The EFFECTS *of* FATIGUE *and* NERVOUS STRAIN

IF you work at high pressure or under worrying conditions you lose tone and vitality. Your nerves become strained and worn. Nervous strain causes restless, sleepless nights, and leads to loss of health and nervous exhaustion.

All this can be avoided if you will only remember that strained nerves are starved nerves; that you have not supplied them with sufficient rebuilding and restorative material to make good the excessive wear and tear of the nervous system.

Only from nourishment can that restorative material be obtained, and only from "Ovaltine" can it be obtained in sufficient quantities for replacing lost energy and for creating reserves of health and strength.

For "Ovaltine" is concentrated nourishment. It contains all the nutritive elements properly balanced, and also all the vitamins in correct proportions.

Made from malt, milk, eggs and cocoa—Nature's tonic foods.

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TONIC FOOD BEVERAGE

Builds-up Brain, Nerve and Body

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The larger tins are more economical to purchase.

'OVALTINE' RUSKS.

More appetising, easily digested and much more nourishing than ordinary rusks or biscuits.

Prices 1/6 and 2/6 per tin.

P 395

gorge narrowed. He read her feelings, marked his success. But he was too clever to dwell upon Sir Claude. Instead he turned to another subject. He spoke of the desert, of the strange life there, of the freedom, the adventure, the passion. And he spoke sincerely, for he loved his home, although, like many Arabs, he loved also the vices of cities now that he had begun to know them. He strove to kindle a blaze in the imagination of the woman beside him, a blaze that would rival the blaze of those diamonds which hung at her neck, moving as she moved, sparkling in the moonlight. They had given a mysterious impetus to his desire which no one not an Oriental could have comprehended. He connected them with their wearer, their brilliance with the brilliance of her angry eyes, their fairness with the fairness of her face, their glitter with the glitter of her hair. In his mind he compared her to a jewel, to a chain of jewels. And as he longed for them he longed for her. He desired to take them into his hands and to take her into his heart. And he spoke like one of the Goblin men of Goblin market. And she listened as to the voice of a Goblin man.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, at last. "If you were not going to-morrow! Going back to England!"

"Perhaps I shall not go," she said.

There was almost a fierce ring in her clear voice that was no longer petulant.

"But if your husband is going?"

"Perhaps I shall not go," she repeated. "We women are not like women who are veiled. Western women are not slaves."

"But he will do what he chooses. I saw it in his eyes when I spoke with him by the river."

"He is not my master."

"I should be your slave."

They were near the mouth of the gorge now, and were walking at the base of that mountain on whose summit was the rock shaped like a resting camel.

"You must not speak to me like that," Lady Wyverne said.

"I should be your slave," he repeated, as if he had not heard her.

"But," she answered, with a faint-hearted attempt to restore a light tone to their conversation—"but in this land it is the women who are like slaves."

"The dark-skinned women! But you—you are fair. You are like a diamond, one of those diamonds you wear."

His hand went out towards the swinging chain instinctively, but he drew it back, making a strong effort to control himself.

"The dark men worship the fair women. You are like the silver moon. You are like the sun when it shines upon the great prayer after the fast of Ram-a-dan. When I see you I am looking at the East. Do you not know it?"

All the time he spoke he was watching her craftily. And yet he was fiercely moved, and by a double desire of possession. Two hearts seemed beating in his breast, the heart of a robber and the heart of a lover. The two controlling passions of the Arab were simultaneously alive within him. At that moment he was capable of falling at Lady Wyverne's feet and giving up his life to her, if she would yield to him. But he was also capable of murdering her for the chain of jewels at her neck if she resisted him. And this is only to say that he was Arab.

Yet though Benchaâlal was on fire at this moment and knew not what he was going to do, what deed of passion or of terror, he never ceased to be watchful of his companion. His cunning waited for the moment when her face should give him a sign that he might dare all.

She had seen his dusky hand go out towards the diamonds, and for an instant had felt a thrill of something that was like repugnance or even fear. But it vanished. For she told herself that the gesture was an absolutely natural one, according with the comparison he made. Nevertheless, there had been something in the look of his hand as it darted out from the folds of his garments, which had startled her and left her more highly strung than she had been before. He knew that, and his following speech had been deliberately languid, like the speech of a poet of the tents.

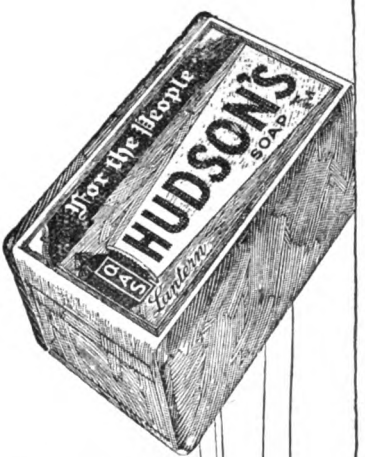
"Do you not know it?" he repeated, going a little closer to her, so that his swinging cloak touched her gently.

"I turn towards Mecca when I pray at dawn, but I turn to you when I pray at night. And you, will you hear my prayer?"

"Hush!" she said.

She spoke quietly, scarcely with reprobation. As she was going to see a last vision of the desert, there was no reason, surely, why she should not listen for the last time to the voice of the desert. And in this desert man she personified the desert

(Continued on page 150.)



IN PACKETS EVERYWHERE

Why must

the same old things be done every day? This is what the disgruntled housewife asks herself, as, morning after morning, she looks at the piles of dirty crockery by the sink, the unmade beds, the potatoes waiting to be peeled. All routine work is monotonous, and perhaps

women have

the most monotonous job of all. But it *can* be made so much easier if you have a household friend like Hudson's Soap to help you through. For washing clothes, for all scrubbing and cleaning. Hudson's Soap in the dishwater changes washing-up from a nightmare into a bright and easy task. For speed and efficiency Hudson's is still

the last word

Hudson's soap

for washing up
for cleaning down

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for the moment. To-morrow the vision would have faded from her eyes and the voice would have died away for ever from her ears. Once more she would have resumed her life with Crumpet. Her sense of resentment against her husband, too, restrained her resentment from falling on another.

In answer to her pretence of rebuke he was suddenly silent. They walked on very slowly. She heard the tap of her high-heeled shoes on the hard road, and thought of the tap of the shoes on the *trottoirs* of Paris. Then she thought of the look of the Spahi's naked feet, that had seemed to clasp the river stones like hands, and of how she had dreamed of those feet padding softly over the desert sands, with a woman's feet beside them.

Well, now a woman's feet were treading beside them, and towards the desert.

For a moment she gave herself up to an imagination. She conceived the impossible accomplished. Suppose she had allowed her caprice to develop; suppose she were a head-strong, unbalanced, passionate, reckless woman, instead of merely a whimsical, pleasure-loving, wilful little creature! Suppose she had been carried away, had gone mad over the Spahi! Suppose that they were really afoot for the great journey, that the past was left behind for ever, hidden like a dropped burden among the rocks of the gorge, that the desert was opening out before them and that she had cast in her lot with the dark people of the waste places of the earth! How extraordinary that would be! For the moment her feather-headed caprice delighted in this imagination, played with it like a child with a coloured ball that floats upward on the wind. She forced herself to live in this dream. Yes, it was so. Her old life was gone for ever. She had done the strangest thing that ever woman had done. How they would talk of her in her old haunts, in the boudoirs of Paris and of London, on the race-courses of Newmarket and of Ascot, on the moors of Scotland under the misty mountains! What would they say of her? Did it matter? They were nothing to her any more, these friends and acquaintances of the past. Their talk would never again be her talk, nor their fads and their crazes hers. From the tyrannies of fashion she was for ever freed, from the changing modes of the hour and of life. To the immutable East she was setting her face, to the land that does not change!

For the moment she was so much under the influence of her own deliberate imagination that she almost was the woman she thought of and he, the Spahi, almost became to her that woman's master. Or slave? Which was it? Which would it be?

As she asked herself this question she glanced at Benchaâlal with an expression in her eyes which had never been in them before when they had looked at him, an expression of deep inquiry, so feminine and yet so searching that it startled him, and added to her personality a charm that hitherto it had lacked, the fascination of mystery. They were close to the opening in the gorge. The desert lay before them. Already in the distance they could see it. Their feet were almost touching the fringes of its vastness, and its magnetic wind came sighing to their cheeks.

To Benchaâlal at this moment it seemed as if events rose to a climax almost dramatically arranged by fate. The three visions—of the diamonds, of his companion's searching eyes, and of the moon-washed desert to which he belonged—gave themselves to his gaze almost as one. They were blended together, fused into a whole. And that whole—he must have it. It must be his, now. He could wait for it no longer. The jewels, the woman, and the desert—they must belong to him, now.

His dark hand shot out again and closed on Lady Wyverne's hand. He did not speak, but the grasp of his hand frightened her. It told her unmistakably that she was in danger. It was arbitrary. It was the hand of a robber as well as of a lover, a hand that could tear to pieces as easily, and perhaps almost as happily, as it could caress. And his eyes now, as they met hers, answered the question hers had asked them, answered it with a fierce frankness that left no room for doubt. The barbarian forced his way up into the light, splitting through the thin crust of civilised culture that had covered him, as an iron bar splits through a pane of glass.

The desert came upon Lady Wyverne and the desert man came upon her, showing himself exactly as he was.

When his hand seized her hand she instinctively recoiled. Instantly his other hand shot out, and seized, not her other hand, but the diamond chain at her neck.

The whole man was nakedly revealed in those two quickly following actions.

(*Continued on page* 152.)

HUMAN DOCUMENTS

Written by men and women who in their joy and gratitude wish to pass the good news along

Run down — suffered from headaches—and afraid to be alone.

Mrs. Kitty Peerless, of 2, Heath Cottages, Poundfield, Crowborough, Sussex, writes:—

MRS. KITTY PEERLESS

"It is nearly four years since I began to feel run-down. I suffered severely with headaches and at night could hardly ever get proper sleep. I never liked to be left alone. Nothing did any good till I started taking Dr. Cassell's Tablets. Then came a wonderful change. Almost from the first I got sleep. As I continued, appetite returned, the headache ceased, and soon I was in splendid health again."

The grim spectre of sleeplessness now completely banished.

Mr. E. A. Church, of 14a, Princes Road, Teddington, Middlesex, says:—

MR. E. A. CHURCH.

"INDIGESTION troubled me soon after I left the Army, and steadily became worse. I was very run-down and weak. I lost flesh, too, and suffered greatly from SLEEPLESSNESS. No medicine I tried did me any good until one day I obtained Dr. Cassells' Tablets, and they had an astonishing effect. Almost from the first I felt better, and at the present moment I am as fit as anyone could wish to be."

Dr. Cassell's can help you too

They are an invaluable tonic in all cases of Overstrain, sleeplessness, stomach disorders, neurasthenia, children's weakness, breakdown, neuritis, malnutrition, anæmia, wasting, hysteria, nerve fatigue, brain fag, indigestion, palpitation, kidney weakness. Of all chemists, 1/3. **Family size, 3/-.**

Sole Distributors: Veno Drug Co. (1925), Ltd., Manchester.

Dr. Cassell's TABLETS

1/3

Get a tin on your way home.

As the Spahi's thin fingers closed upon the diamonds Lady Wyverne knew the depth of her folly, and there came to her a sickening horror in which the desert was condemned with the man. Tradition rushed back to the place in her nature from which her caprice had ousted it. Her heart clamoured for the blessed protection of the commonplace which she had been rejecting, and the peculiar disgust which so many white-skinned people feel towards the dark races of the earth suddenly rose up in her, rose to the level of her husband's.

All this vehement recoil of her nature the Spahi felt as it was born. His right hand abandoned her hand and joined its greedy brother on her jewels. The lover in him, rejected, became the parent of the passionate robber.

His hands tore at the diamonds.

Hidden among the rocks to the left of the road, a watching man had, for some seconds, which seemed to him long nights of impenetrable blackness, held a gun to his shoulder with a steady hand, his finger upon the trigger. One reason alone had prevented him from firing.

He did not know whether he wished to shoot the woman or the man upon the road.

While he waited, still as the rocks which concealed him, the woman started back from the Spahi and the Spahi's hand left her hand and darted at her jewels.

Then the man among the rocks knew. He moved slightly and he levelled his gun at the Spahi.

But before he could fire there came upon the Spahi a rushing figure, whose bright green robe showed clearly in the moonbeams; and the hands that clutched the diamonds broke the chain that united them, as the Spahi sank down upon the road with a knife between his shoulders.

"Allah! Allah! Allah!"

The long, fierce cry went up in the night.

Sir Claude leaped into the road. As his arms went round his wife the cry rose up again.

"Allah! Allah! Allah!"

Then it died away in a whimper that was like an animal's, as the mad Marabout dropped down to his knees beside the Spahi's body, and began carefully to pick up, one by one, the jewels that were scattered over it, gleaming in the moonbeams like crystals of the desert.

When day dawned the Arab boy strolled lazily along the bank of the river till he reached his nook in the rocks. There he squatted down, folded his burnous round his slim body, drew forth from his breast his little flute of reed, and, putting his dusky fingers to the holes, sent forth airily to the sun the melody that was like caprice personified in music.

An Old-style Ship

THERE was the corvette in very truth—she had just tacked, and was close aboard of us on our lee quarter, within musket shot at the farthest, bowling along upon a wind, with the green, hissing, multitudinous sea surging along her sides, and washing up in foam, like snowflakes, through the mid-ship ports, far aft on the quarterdeck, to the glorification of Jack, who never minds a wet jacket, so long as he witnesses the discomfiture of his ally, Peter Pipeclay. The press of canvas she was carrying laid her over, until her copper sheathing, clear as glass, and glancing like gold, was seen high above the water, throughout her whole length, above which rose her glossy, jet-black bends, surmounted by a milk-white streak, broken at regular intervals into eleven goodly ports, from which the British cannon, ugly customers at the best, were grinning, tompion out, open-mouthed at us; and above all, the clean, well-stowed white hammocks filled the nettings, from tafferel to cat-head—oh! that I had been in one of them, snug on the berth deck!

MICHAEL SCOTT.

APH
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v.1
Feb-May.

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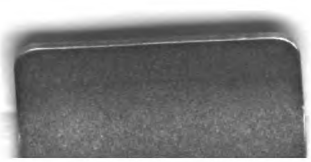

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